Silk

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Silk

by TigerPrawn

Summary

Will Graham has never had an easy life, and it gets worse before it gets better. But things do get better once he starts to indulge his love of dance and eventually ends up as a star performer at a cabaret - dinner and a show - club. The freedom it offers him and support he finds, he is sure is all that he can possibly desire from life. Until he discovers that his biggest fan in the audience is the ER doctor that changed his life years earlier, a man he finds interesting.

Playlist of songs used throughout the fic
My other home is Twitter

Notes

This is an AU so characterisations aren't 100% canon. That said, Will is quite OOC in the first couple of chapters because he is subjected to abuse and it isn't until that is over and he is able to find his feet, that he comes into his own.

Thank you to the lovely Colleen for asking me to write this! I enjoyed it so much and I hope you all do too 💖
This fic is complete and will be posting weekly (with one or two breaks).

Full list of songs in this fic -
Chapter one:
Fire Rides – MØ
Dance To The Music - Sly & The Family Stone

Chapter two:
Say Amen - Panic at the Disco

Chapter three:
Never Never – Korn

Chapter four:
Brick House – Commodores
Closer – The Chainsmokers

Chapter five:
Biting Down – Lorde

Chapter six:
Hurts Like Hell – Fleurie

Chapter seven:
Addicted To You – Avicii

Chapter eight:
Ex's & Oh's - Elle King
I Feel You – Depeche Mode

Chapter nine:
The Pretender - Foo Fighters

Chapter ten:
Tomorrow We'll See – Sting
Nearly Forgot My Broken Heart - Chris Cornell

Chapter eleven:
None

Chapter twelve:
The Vengeful One - Disturbed
Glitter & Gold - Barns Courtney

Chapter 1

Everything spun.

The world tilted.

And then there was the crunch.

Will's throat hurt from screaming, tears flowing down his face as the car rocked to a stop, back upright but on the lower road.

The rain hammered against the windows and through the blur it caused he could see oncoming headlights slowing to a stop.

“Mom,” Will cried, trying to reach for her chair in front of him, but he couldn’t get that far. His seat belt was pulled painfully tight and locked. It felt like it was crushing him, only just allowing him to breathe, and each breath causing a jolt of pain through his chest.

He listened to see if he could hear her respond, but all he could hear was the rain.

“Mom?” The word came out as a childish whimper that spoke of his age. He was a smart kid, and often confused for being older than his twelve years. But now he seemed very young, as his world fell apart around him.

As the rain continued to fall.

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Will woke with a start.

Sweat soaked his t-shirt and boxers. His blankets were twisted around him and damp through. He took a sharp breath as he let his eyes focus on his surroundings - his shit hole apartment. Before sinking back against the sodden pillows.

Everything was wet. It always was when Will had one of his frequent nightmares. A sort of cruel irony that they always featured the heavy rain of that terrible night. It almost felt as though he had been out in it, he was so wet when he woke.

He shuddered as he remembered the long hours of the emergency services cutting the car apart. The rain pouring down on them all, him included, as they tried to pull apart the wreckage. Sometimes in his dreams those people helping were solid black as the night, antlers sprouting from their heads as Will realised they weren’t helping at all, but letting his mother die.

He’d been so cold. His mother had been colder.

Will let out a breath and shivered, sweat cooling on his skin and freezing him. It was only 3 am, he needed more sleep. He moved from the bed and stripped the blankets off, throwing them on the floor to worry about later. Out of habit now, he grabbed two towels from the cupboard, laying one down on the bed, including over the pillow. He pulled the other over him as a blanket, curling up into a ball under it as he tried to get back to sleep. Hoping not to dream again.

When his alarm went off at 5.30am, it felt like he had only just closed his eyes. Will sighed and picked up his phone to turn off his alarm and switch to his music app, setting the first song in his playlist going as he tried to pull himself from bed.

[Fire Rides – MØ]

Pure sweet violent hearts
Believes the signs we see in the cards
Believes the signs we read in our dreams

Will ached from the position he'd been in, stiff from holding himself tight together for warmth. His next paycheck he'd get a couple of spare blankets, some more sheets and pillows. He was still living off of the few things he'd been able to bring from his dad's place, and the kind handouts of neighbours.

It wasn't a lot. A cheap apartment near his new job, and enough money to get by. He'd have left his dad's place for less.

What's it gonna be with the violence?
What's it gonna be when the fire rides?
And what's it gonna be like when the sound of you and I die out?

The thought gave him a momentary pause of guilt.

What am I to do in my room?
Look at the walls turning yellow
What am I to do in the city?
If I can't have it all and I just wanna feel pity

His dad was sick, he had to remind himself. But that didn't mean that Will had to let himself be subjected to his behaviour or his abuse. He'd turned twenty-one and that seemed a reasonable time to move out. Away from the constant pile up of empty bottles that would overrun the place if he didn't trash them every other day. Away from the cruel words his dad spat at him when he so much as breathed.

For my own doomed soul, doomed as the source
Where can I find peace in the city?
As I found in the eyes of yours

Will hoped, deep down, that his dad didn't mean the things he said. That it was just the booze talking. But he couldn't continue living there, being told day after day how he should have died instead of his mother.

In too deep, give up and run
No fire rides, oh, bitch, you've got it wrong

He looked like her. Was smart like her. A reminder every day of what his dad had lost, and at some point that had become too much for the old man. At some point he stopped caring about how much he drank. And Will couldn't help but wonder if his being there was doing his dad more harm than good.

I just wanna walk to the mountains
Walk to the mountains all alone
With my own doomed soul, doomed as the source
Where can I find peace in the city?

When the old man started to beat on him again like he had when she'd first died, Will knew he it wasn't okay. But it wasn't until his dad had come home blind drunk and smacked Will about until he'd fallen into the coffee table that he realised he needed to make plans to get

out. The shattered glass had cut into his flesh just above the knee, leaving a scar when it finally healed. And then he'd left. Packed a few things in the middle of the night and let himself out.

He'd left his number with a couple of neighbours and planned to drop in every couple of weeks and check on his dad. But other than that he tried hard not to think about how great it was to finally be free of the situation. It made him feel selfish, like a bad son. His return visits became less frequent, and he never went back inside the house, just saying hello from the porch.

What's it gonna be with the violence?
What's it gonna be when the fire rides in?
What's it gonna be like when the sound of you and I die out?

Will let out a heavy sigh and turned the music off before throwing back the covers, trudging to the tiny bathroom to get a shower before he needed to head to the garage.

He'd been working there for a few months now and it was working out great. He got on well with the owner, Jack Crawford who was teaching him so much. Before his mom had died, Will had spent his childhood helping with his dad's boat engine business. He could take one apart and put it back together again better than half the people that had worked for his dad, before everything had gone to shit.

Learning car motors was enough the same that, with guidance from Jack he was a quick study. And Jack clearly appreciated his hard work and dedication. As did his wife Phyllis who often dropped by with lunch for both of them.

It was eating with them in the garage office that reminded Will of what it was like to have a family. How things had been before his mom died. But in a happy way, in a way that wasn't painful to recall, because he felt the fondness they both had for him.

The thought made Will smile as he dressed. Pulling him out of the dark places his mind had been going when he showered. Back into his dreams and memories.

By the time he left his apartment he felt almost human, as though the nightmare hadn't happened at all. Though it was more the case that it had happened so many times now, beyond any attempt at recording the number, that it was just getting easier to slide back into real life.

"Morning Will," Jack raised a hand of greeting from the engine he was elbow deep in. He'd probably been at the garage since Will had been up, they'd been so busy lately.

"Hey Jack, need a hand?" Will asked as he dropped his satchel on the side workbench and walked over to his boss.

Jack waved him away, "Nah, just want to get this one back out front and make room. We've got a few booked in for services today and we're a person down with Miriam on vacation."

Jack finished tightening a valve and then stood up, wiping a hand over his brow and smudging it with engine oil before stopping to study Will.

“How do you feel about flying solo a bit? I think you’re competent enough to handle a service on your own.” Jack told him, brooking no argument.

Will smiled, “Sure, I can do that.”

He wasn’t ignorant of the trust Jack was giving him. It was his business, his reputation. And it was a hell of a reputation. He wasn’t going to do anything to endanger it.

“Great,” Jack slapped a large, oiled hand on the back of Will’s coveralls and then gripped his shoulder, giving him a friendly squeeze. “I’ve got two jobs arriving at 8, you can take Matt Brown, I’ll do Mrs Komeda. She can be a bit prickly, but still comes back every time. We’ll work you up to her when your customer service skills match your mechanic skills,” Jack joked, letting out a laugh. “Matt’s a quiet lad, so you’ll be fine. Just take his keys, book it all in and tell him when to come back.”

Will nodded. He’d seen them doing services many a time, so he already knew how Jack liked things done. And that was exactly how he was going to do them.

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When Matt had dropped the car he’d been rushing off to work. He was polite and smiled at Will in a way that made him blush a little. A little double take and wide grin when he really looked at him. A brief interaction that Will recalled the moment Matt arrived back to pick his car up again.

It was late in the day, just before closing, when Matt rushed in, breathless.

“Shit, sorry. Getting the bus in this city is hellish,” Matt apologised as he entered the garage.

Will made a point of not looking over, trying to remain coy, when Jack answered with a chuckle, “That they are my friend. Speaking of travelling, I need to be on my way. Phyllis’s parents are coming over for dinner so I better scrub up. Are you okay to finish up Will?”

Will looked over then, seeing his boss pulling on his jacket, and Matt Brown standing there with an open smile.

“Um, sure Jack.” Will replied. He’d locked up before but rarely served customers with no one else there. Part of him was thrilled that Jack trusted him enough to leave him to it, but part of him was pulled tight with nerves at being alone with Matt.

Maybe he had misread the situation, but it felt like Matt might have an interest in him, and whilst Will wasn’t uninterested, he had no idea how to deal with the situation.

Jack said his final goodbyes and left, closing the door behind him.

“I’ll um, I’ll grab the bill and keys for you. I already pulled the car around out back earlier so you’ll be, um, good to go.” Will said, his mouth dry as Matt continued to gaze at him with a

friendly grin.

“Have you worked here long?” Matt made polite conversation as Will grabbed the paperwork from the desk and handed it to the man.

“Not long,” Will replied, very aware of how terrible he was at making conversation. Usually he had no inclination to do so, and so it didn’t much matter. But Matt seemed nice, and Will got a warm feeling in his belly when the man smiled at him. Will had never exactly been good at flirting or dating. Too blunt by far for either. And he wasn’t even sure if Matt’s friendliness was actually some kind of interest. Either way, it seemed unlikely that Matt would be interested for long if he continued to be so impossible to interact with.

Before he could say any more Matt chuckled, “Quiet thing aren’t you?”

“I, um…” Will went to protest but Matt waved a dismissive hand.

“It’s okay, I like the quiet ones,” He grinned at Will, and Will was sure that he was about to wink too, though he restrained himself from that it would seem.

Matt looked away, down at the bill, “Cheque okay?”

“Y-yeah,” Will replied, unsettled by what he was sure was flirtation, and wishing he knew how to handle it.

Matt set the bill on the desk and grabbed his checkbook, writing out the check as he continued to talk. “Do you guys accept tips?”

“Um, no… That’s not, um, it’s not necessary to tip. And besides, you haven’t even seen the car yet.”

It wasn’t a joke, but Matt barked a laugh at Will’s words. “Maybe you should come on a test drive with me then, make sure it’s safe.”

Will blinked, unsure how he should respond when Matt looked up at him with a grin. They stared at each other for a moment before Matt looked back at the cheque he was writing. Will had no idea if he was joking or not.

“Seriously though, do you need a lift anywhere? Can I drop you home? Looks like the heavens are about to open out there.” Matt asked casually as he finished signing the cheque. He looked back up again, handing the bill and cheque to Will.

“Thanks but I, I don’t live far. I’ll be okay.” Will replied mentally kicking himself the moment the words left his mouth. Perhaps Matt meant it as more than a friendly offer, perhaps-

“Well, you want to grab a drink sometime then instead?” Matt asked, holding onto the papers so that Will couldn’t immediately pull them away.

Will blushed and looked away, and then down at his feet. “Yeah, sure. I guess that would be… yeah.”

Matt let go of the papers and Will took a moment to check the details before walking over to the till and putting them in there. He deliberately didn't look at Matt, but felt the man's eyes following him as he moved.

"I should lock up," Will said, grabbing his small backpack from the side and reaching for his set of keys that were on the desk.

"Sure," Matt agreed, casual and light. Which Will couldn't help but feel was slightly at odds with the near predatory expression on his face when Will turned to face him. Will blushed again, not used to having someone show such clear interest.

This made Matt smile and for a second, Will was sure the man was going to reach up and touch his cheek. Flustered, Will stepped back, the movement causing his backpack to jostle and some contents to spill out.

"Dammit," Will muttered under his breath, dropping to his knees to collect up the well thumbed library book he was reading, and his oversized pencil case.

Matt crouched next to him, starting to help gather the items too, picking up the case and turning it over in his hands.

"You in school?" Matt asked.

"No, it's… um, a hobby." Will replied. It was more than that but he didn't want to have this conversation with someone the first time they met. He reached over to take the case from Matt, but to his embarrassment, Matt held it back from him and then moved out of reach.

He stood and started to open the case before Will was even on his feet.

"Please," Will started, receiving in return a teasing smile.

Matt looked into the case with a frown, poking his finger into it, "Feathers and… What are these for? The- Ouch!" Matt pulled his finger back and shook his hand as though that would lessen the pain of having pricked the tip of his finger.

"Fishing lures… materials for making them," Will explained.

"That's… an odd hobby. There isn't anywhere within an hours drive that you can fish around here," Matt laughed. It wasn't cruel, but it was the sort of dismissive laugh Will was used to.

"They aren't, I…" Will started, feeling his chest tighten.

At his expression, Matt clearly realised that Will was upset by the reaction and handed the case quickly back.

'Shit, I'm sorry. Sometimes my foot likes to live in my mouth. I didn't mean to offend. I was just surprised. I think it's cool you make things. Creative people are always so interesting."

Will tried for a smile at the words that had gone a little way to easing the offence.

“I hope you don’t think me too much of an asshole,” Matt smiled gently, in a way that made Will’s heart skip a little. “I’d really still love to get that drink.”

“Yeah, it’s… I’m used to it. My dad always hated me making these,” Will replied with a half truth.

The whole truth was that his dad had hated *him* after his mother had died, and by extension anything he did. But there were two things Bill Graham hated the most about Will - his grades and his lures. Both of which he interpreted as Will lording it over him. Which was ridiculous.

But Bill Graham was an insecure, unhappy man. When Will made good grades at school, instead of praising him like most parents would, he accused Will of thinking he was better than everyone. Will had had aspirations to study science, maybe go to college, but Bill Graham had beat that idea out of him. The lures were just another thing for his dad to hate.

He'd started making them for fun, when it was quiet at the boatyard whilst his dad worked on engines. One day one of the fishermen had asked to buy some, so Will had sold them, not even knowing if they were a good price.

Making the lures was an escape for him, being able to just work with his hands and create, zone out completely and focus on the art of it. Probably another thing his dad had hated. When he spent some time at the public library in the winter making fanciful ones that were more decoration than practical lure, one of the librarians had seen them and loved them. She bought one for him and suggested he get a few framed and sell them as decorations at the county fair. Will had blushed and not taken the suggestion seriously. But as people sought him out over the preceding months, word of mouth having made the rounds in the small town he’d grown up in, Will started to really consider it.

A year after that conversation he'd saved enough money for more materials, including for some simple frames and mounts, and the cost of a stall at the fair. The venture paid off and Will made all his money back and more. Much more.

Not that he saw a penny of it.

When he got home, his dad had taken the money and beaten his ass for good measure. He hadn’t told his dad what he was doing because he knew he’d find some reason to hate it. He’d already had a weirdly jealous reaction to Will selling to the fishermen, once again angry that Will was good at something that he wasn’t. He had berated Will and derided the lures, saying Will would make more money selling his ass like a whore.

The money had been drunk away by his dad and he didn’t make another lure until he finally left. Not least because his dad had made sure of it by stomping on his hands. They healed up fine in the end, but it wasn’t a lesson he was going to forget.

Matt was looking at him expectantly, clearly wanting elaboration. So instead Will forced a chuckle and shook his head dismissively.

“It’s silly, never mind. I, um, sell them online. Sometimes at craft fairs.” Will replied, tentatively. He had stopped making them, after the battering his self esteem had taken when his dad had found out about him selling them. Slowly he’d started making them again for his own stress relief once he'd left. Finally putting a couple up online just to see what would happen. And they sold, slowly his confidence in them started to return and he had to remind himself that his dad was just a small minded man who wanted to make Will feel as small as he was.

“Oh!” Matt seemed interested, raising a brow, “Fishermen buy these?”

“Sometimes,” Will replied brightly, excited by the interest Matt was showing over something he usually kept to himself. “I do have a range that are actually fishing flies, but I also sell loads framed as decoration. Different to the ones for fishing. But they make great gifts for avid fishers and things like that.”

“That’s really awesome,” Matt replied, clearly impressed.

Will felt his heart swell at the reaction.

He zipped the case back up and put it in his backpack again, before indicating the door in the closed garage door.

They walked silently towards it, Will opening it to let Matt go out before him. Sure enough the sky looked dark, but Will was certain he'd get home before the weather really turned. As tempted as he was to just ask Matt for a ride after all.

Will stepped out and turned, locking the two locks on the door and using the time to gather his nerve to talk more. Though he had no idea what he was going to say.

When he turned to face Matt once more, the man was leaning against his car and smiling gently.

“So,” Matt said, “Can I get your number?”

Will smiled and felt his heart give a little flutter.

*

Will danced joyfully around his tiny studio apartment, having to wiggle and twirl to avoid the few items of furniture in the cramped space.

He felt elated and his heart was a flutter. He turned on his music, making the most of the jubilant feeling, choosing one of his mom’s favourites.

[Dance To The Music - Sly & The Family Stone]

Get up and dance to the music!
Get on up and dance to the fonky music!

One week ago he had met Matt Brown. And the evening before, he had gone on a date with the man. He wasn't sure at first that that was what it was. In the garage and via message they had discussed it only as 'drinks' and Will hadn't dared say anything in case it turned out to be only that and he'd misread the situation entirely.

All we need is a drummer,
For people who only need a beat, yeah!
I'm gonna add a little guitar
And make it easy to move your feet

It wasn't hard, given that he had spent years hiding his sexuality from his father. He could only imagine what the man would have done if he'd found out that Will was gay. He wasn't exactly great at flirting and was worried about potentially misinterpreting a situation.

Dance to the Music, Dance to the Music

So it was with excitement that Will had grinned when Matt had made a throw away comment about their being on a date. They had taken their seats at the bar and Matt, laughing, had said it was his favourite bar and so never usually took dates there in case it went badly and spoiled the place for him. He had made the exception for Will.

Will had been flattered, blushing as Matt chuckled sweetly at his reaction and kissed him on a burning cheek.

The whole evening had been wonderful. Matt made him feel so good about himself, saying how wonderful Will was. How beautiful and sexy. Smart and interesting. Remarking that he was the total package and a shocker that Will was still single.

Will wasn't sure he'd ever blushed so much in his entire life, which Matt also determined to be 'adorable as hell'.

When Matt dropped him home after, close enough to midnight to make Will question whether he should invite the man in, considering he had the early shift at the garage in the morning. But as it was Matt clearly had no intention of coming in. He had stopped the car, walked Will to the front door of the small apartment block, and took hold of his hand. He'd told Will how much he enjoyed the evening and wanted to see him again if Will was willing. When Will agreed he was, Matt leaned in and kissed him.

It wasn't chaste, but it wasn't pornographic either. He kissed slowly and with purpose. When his tongue brushed against Will's lips, Will had opened his mouth to him. But even then, despite Will's moan, he hadn't deepened the kiss.

When he pulled back and said goodnight, Will was flustered and warm. Half hard and ready to invite Matt up to his apartment, early shift be damned!

But before he could, Matt cupped a hand against his cheek, stroking his thumb over his heated skin, and told Will he couldn't wait to see him again, before heading back to his car.

Despite the undersexed end to the evening, Will was still buzzing. High on the praise and attention Matt had lavished him with.

The music Will had put on when he'd woken up flipped to the next, even more energetic, song and he danced his way to the kitchen.

Dancing always reminded him of good times. It was what he and his mom used to do. When there was something to be happy about or even over something sad, they would dance around the house to some of his mom's favourites. He had wanted to dance at school, but knew his dad would have gone nuts about it, no matter how supportive his mom was.

But when she died, that was an end to it anyway.

He didn't dance around his home again until the day he finally escaped from his dad and moved into this crappy little place, several city's away. He could have lived in a box and he'd have been happy. Anything to get away from his dad.

Anything to be able to dance again.

He imagined talking to his mom, telling her about the nice boy he met. Who was sweet and adoring and made him feel so appreciated. All just in one evening.

When Matt asked how he came to be working at Jack's garage, Will hesitated for only a moment before starting to tell his date about his dad. About the years of abuse and anger his father had subjected him to after the death of his mother. There was something open about Matt, and something so caring in the way he had talked to him, that it had been easy to tell him these things.

He had been surprised and heartened by Matt's response to his summarised tale. Matt had gotten angry, balled his fists on the bar and his face heated.

He had muttered between his teeth that Will's dad hadn't deserved him and that it broke his heart that Will had been treated in such a way.

Remembering it now, he sobered a little, feeling a pull of want towards Matt and the protectiveness he'd shown. Mom would definitely have liked him, she'd have liked to know someone was looking out for him.

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"What's with you?" Jack asked when he arrived at the garage and discovered Will whistling a jaunty tune.

Will looked up from the engine he was elbows deep in, having completely missed his boss enter and speak, "Huh?"

Barney, who had arrived to open up the same time as Will, let out a chuckle from where he was brewing a coffee at the little bench that passed as a kitchen of sorts.

"You won't get any sense out of him. He's twitterpated." Barney grinned.

Will rolled his eyes, already having heard this once this morning and having to have the meaning of the word explained to him. Barney was referencing a Disney movie where some of the characters were, for all intents and purposes, all a buzz because they were falling in love. When Barney had explained the characters were animals, Will had raised a brow and cautiously asked the man if he was talking about mating season.

Barney had let out a booming laugh and shook his head as though Will were just a naive young thing.

Jack started laughing, clearly not needing the definition of the word.

“Will Graham, what are you hiding from us? You got some sweet young lady on the go and you’ve managed to keep it a secret?”Jack asked.

Will took a breath, a stab of anxiety running through him.

They had never had need to discuss his sexuality, it shouldn’t even factor. But since Barney had made the same assumption, though been more subtle about it, Will felt weird not correcting then. And not because he felt he should, or that he was hiding something from them, but because he needed to know if he was working with bigots.

It was something that had been at the back of his mind the first day he had wandered in and asked Jack if there were any jobs available. He had needed work, and been desperate enough that he would have worked with anyone and just kept his mouth shut.

But now it seemed like he was onto a good thing. Everyone was nice, he fit in with them somehow. And he wanted to stay in this job. There was so much he could learn from Jack, and had been so much kindness so far. The thought of anyone he worked with being homophobic hurt his heart. But before he got too settled, he needed to know.

What if he worked there for years on end? Made a life? And then they discovered he was gay and kicked him out? It would almost be worse than when he left his dad, because he’d wanted to leave there. He didn’t want to leave Jack and Barney, not if he could help it. It would break his heart. His dad had broken his heart when he was a child, so it had been no hardship to run when he turned twenty-one. He wanted to pull the bandaid off quick in this case.

“Um,” Will started, stopped and swallowed. His heart was racing and his palms were immediately damp with sweat. “It’s not a girl. It’s, um, Matt Brown.”

Will’s heart fell when Jack’s face did. He looked angry and his jaw clenched.

Will felt his throat and chest tighten in response.

“I should leave,” He said, preempting what was to come and not wanting any trouble.

Jack and Barney both frowned at him.

“What are you talking about?” Barney asked.

“I… If my being gay is a problem here, I should-”

Barney let out a bark of laughter, “Don’t be a fool kid, there’s no problem here. Jack?”

Barney raised his brows in surprise when he turned to see Jack’s face contorted with concern.

Jack shook his head, “No, no. Shit, Will. Don’t ever think that. You’re just fine kid. The boy Phyllis and I fostered for some years was gay, we know what a hard time you kids can have…” He trailed off, clearly still deeply bothered by something.

Both Will and Barney were clearly relieved but there was definitely something more going on.

“It’s just… Randall, my foster kid. He… dated Matt for a while. And just, be careful, okay?” Jack’s eyes practically penetrated him and Will wasn’t sure how to handle a parental concern he hadn’t been exposed to since his mother had died.

“But, last week you said he was a good guy,” Will replied, confused.

“I did,” Jack recalled and scrubbed at his chin. “I always thought he was a pretty stand-up guy, just he and Randall weren’t right for each other. But I talked to Randy at the weekend, he called from college and I mentioned Matt had been by for a service. He hadn’t been happy about it, wouldn’t tell me the details, but asked me not to let Matt know his new number or address or anything.” Jack paused and stepped to Will, putting a hand on his shoulder in a comforting and paternal gesture.

“I don’t know what happened there, but I trust Randy. So just be careful. My guess is their break up was messier than I knew. And I don’t want you to get into something that’s-”

“Jack, I… I appreciate the concern. I really do,” Will gave a gentle smile, really meaning it. “But he’s been nothing but sweet to me. Honestly, I don’t know what happened between him and your foster son, but Matt has been very kind to me. And I… I think I’m a fairly good judge of character.”

And he was. He'd always had a good sense of people and sometimes felt things a little too deeply. Maybe it was the weird intuition his dad always said he'd inherited from his mom. Or maybe it was just years of having to judge always done dodge his dad's moods? Either way, he was good at seeing people right down to their very core.

For Matt to be anything but the kind-hearted man Will had found him to be, then he'd have to really be putting on a hell of an act. Practically wearing a second skin, and if that were remotely true, Will was sure he'd see through that pretty quickly too.

Jack gave a smile, slightly forced but he nodded nonetheless.

“Alright, Will. But if things go south, you can lean on us, okay? We’re all a family here.” Jack told him firmly.

Will swallowed around the lump in his throat and nodded.

“Thanks Jack.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Looking for love in all the wrong places...

Chapter Notes

NB: This chapter includes Will being in an abusive relationship and some physical violence. The worst of it happens “off screen”, but there is still physical abuse content in this chapter.
Also, I’m not a doctor, don’t @ me if the medical details are wrong, please just suspend you belief <3

No shade on the character of Matt Brown (this is not a canon fic), but he is an abusive loon in this. Totally unhinged. SOMEONE HELP WILL GRAHAM!

SUPER IMPORTANT NOTE: LINKED MUSIC VIDEO WITHIN FEATURES GRAPHIC VIOLENCE! YOU CAN ALSO LISTEN TO IT ON THE SPOTIFY PLAYLIST IN THE FIRST CHAPTER NOTES WITHOUT VISUALS!!

Two Years Later:

“Could you stop fucking dancing.” Matt didn’t shout, the words were ground out in a menacing tone that sent a chill up Will’s spine.

Will stopped dead on the spot. He’d had a great day at work, he and Jack had started a project - taking apart a written off classic mustang they’d picked up cheap at auction. He was excited to learn more about classic cars as they attempted to fix it up with a mixture of vintage and modern parts. He was even more excited that Jack had wanted to get him involved, not Barney or the couple of other guys that worked there. It was an invaluable experience that Will could never repay him for.

But sometimes Matt wanted quiet. He worked hard at the hospital and sometimes had really long shifts. Being a porter could be tiring, and physically demanding work. He should have waited and told Matt in the morning when he was rested, not as soon as he got home from his shift.

“Sorry, Matt. I didn’t think-”

“You never fucking think!” Matt snapped back.

He glared at Will for a moment and Will tried not to let his fear and hurt show. Matt was right though, he could be so thoughtless.

After a moment Matt’s features softened and he smiled, “I’m sorry babe. You know how I can get when you wind me up.”

Will nodded, and gave a weak smile, “I know, I’m sorry.”

Matt grinned and gestured for Will to go to him. Will did, moving slowly towards the sofa.

When he was close enough, Matt grabbed his wrist - perhaps a little harder than necessary - and pulled him down into his lap, so that Will was straddling him.

“I forgive you babe, always do. You know that.” Matt whispered against his ear as his hands went around Will’s ass and pulled them close together. Will let out a shuddering breath. He wasn’t in the mood for sex. Matt had been really rough with him the day before, and whilst Will wasn’t averse to that, he hadn’t been in the mood and the prep had been minimal. It wasn’t much blood, but there had been some and that had scared Will.

Matt laughed it off and pointed out that sometimes that’s how it went when people played rough. Will had nodded and forced a smile. He was right, sometimes it hurt, that was just how it was.

But the thought of having sex again when he still felt raw and hurt, sent a shiver through him.

When Matt started kissing insistently at his neck, Will tried to push him back.

“Not tonight Matt, please. I still don’t feel great after last night.” Will hid his plea in a jovial tone, trying to make light and hope Matt didn’t get angry.

“Come on, babe. You know you’re my favourite stress relief. It’s been a hard day. And you’ve had an amazing day from the sounds of it. So you sort of owe me,” Matt growled the words and Will froze for a moment, before forcing a light laugh.

“I know, but maybe I can just suck you off?” Will bargained.

“Fucksake, Will.” Matt replied angrily, and pushed Will, shoving him hard he fell onto the floor, with a painful bump. “Your dad was fucking wrong about you being able to make money as a whore.”

As soon as the words were out there, Will cringed and felt a cold stab inside him. Yet another thing he regretted ever having told Matt over the years. Just another thing he could throw back when Will had upset him.

“I’m sorry…” Will started, staying where he was on the floor, not knowing what Matt wanted him to do.

“Fucking waste of my time,” Matt ground out the words through grit teeth and got to his feet. Will flinched as Matt strode past him, not relaxing until he heard their apartment door slam shut behind him.

Will let out a shaky breath. Then a sob. He let himself shed a few tears before pulling himself together. Matt wouldn’t be like this if Will didn’t antagonise him. And he’d never hurt Will, not really. And Will knew he never would.

Sure, he’d pushed him now and then, but he’d never slapped or kicked or punched him, or anything like that. Matt loved him and would never hurt him on purpose.

Will shook his head, mad at himself for thinking badly of Matt. Remembering all the great times they had. The times he thought about when Jack would ask how things were going and he’d reply that everything was amazing. Matt was amazing. He loved Will so much, and really, sometimes Will wasn’t sure that he deserved that much love. And Matt had even pointed that out to him as well. Trying to help him be a better person.

Will got up from the floor and wiped his sleeve across his face, soaking up the tears and then heading to the bathroom to freshen up.

He really didn’t deserve Matt Brown, and should always remember that.

*

“Will, this has to stop. Please!” Jack pleaded with him and Will had to admit he felt bad about Jack being so upset, but he had Matt all wrong.

Of course he believed everything Randall had said to him, he was Jack’s foster kid after all, but Matt had told Will everything. All of Randall’s shitty behaviour and how he’d left Matt broken hearted. Not least because, when they broke up, he turned it all around and accused Matt of all the terrible behaviour.

And of course, Will couldn’t say any of this to Jack. Not only would he not believe it, Will was sure. But he loved Randall and Will wasn’t going to be the one to try to convince him of what a bad egg he was.

“It’s nothing, Jack.” Will snapped back as he pulled on his coverall.

“Let me guess, you walked into a door?” Jack growled, Will frowning, knowing what Jack was trying to do. He’d gone mad when he’d seen the bruises on Will’s wrist, and coming up with such a ridiculous line was both an attempt to force Will to explain what had actually happened whilst hinting at Matt having abused him.

Which wasn’t how it was, at all.

“I fell and Matt grabbed me to stop me hitting the floor.” Will snapped.

“And what about the last time, Will? And the time before that?”

Will shook, anger and fear and so many other emotions running through him. “He doesn’t mean-”

“Will!” Jack stopped him firmly, “What happened to that bright young man that turned up here telling me about boat engines? Quiet and shy, but not stupid. Don’t you see how you’ve changed since you’ve been with him?”

Will felt tears stinging his eyes, “Please Jack, don’t…”

Jack shook his head, the muscles in his jaw jumping as he clenched his teeth, no doubt holding back more words.

“Will, just… know that if you ever need any help. I’m here, we’re here. Okay?”

Will nodded, silently.

*

Will left work and started off his playlist, putting his hands in his pockets as he walked.

[Say Amen - Panic at the Disco]

Been traveling in packs that I can't carry anymore
Been waiting for somebody else to carry me
There's nothing else there for me at my door
All the people I know aren't who they used to be
And if I try to change my life one more day
There would be nobody else to save
And I can't change into a person I don't wanna be, so
Oh, it's Saturday night, yeah

Will breathed in the slight chill in the air as he walked, feeling a slight sense of dread as he walked. He’d had a long day, it had been a busy one. He just hoped Matt was in a good mood.

I pray for the wicked on the weekend
Mama, can I get another amen?

Will’s phone vibrated in his pocket, cutting the music off instantly in favour of the incoming call.

“Is this Will Graham?”

Will didn’t recognise the voice. He hadn’t recognised the number either, and nearly hadn’t answered it when it had popped up on his cell phone as he was walking home from work.

He had to assume it was a cold call, someone selling insurance or some other bullshit.

“No thanks, I don’t need whatever you’re selling-”

“No, Will, sorry. I should have introduced myself. My name is Randall, I’m Jack’s son. Well, foster son. He gave me your number and asked me to call you.”

Will’s face heated and his breath caught. He felt his hand shaking with anger as he held the phone to his ear, his grip on it tightening.

“He had no right to-”

“Hey, I know. He can be a bit overprotective. He’s just looking out for you, but I get it, you have every right to be angry. Can we talk, just a minute?” There was such a tone of support and compassion in Randall’s voice that it made his chest hurt.

Will took a moment, not sure whether to just hang up. Matt hated him talking to other guys, always thinking there was more to it. And this was worse, this was Matt’s ex.

Will remembered a couple of months earlier when they’d gone out for dinner. Will had apparently been too polite to the waiter, too interested and engaging. When they had left Matt had pushed him against the car, bruising his ribs, pinning him there with a hard hand against his chest as he told Will off. Annoyed that he had been leading the waiter on like that, right in front of him too.

Will had apologised, he knew how jealous Matt got and should have realised. He hadn’t been anything more than friendly, but had to concede how the waiter could have misinterpreted it as flirting.

Will rubbed his chest, feeling a phantom of the pain from that night as he nodded and then said, “Okay. Just a minute.”

“Will, there’s no easy way to say this, and I know you might not believe me. But I hope you’ll take this to heart, keep it in mind for the future. And ask for help if you need it.” Randall took a breath, “Dad will always be there for you, if you need him okay? But, Matty is trouble. I managed to get free of him. The third time he hit me was three times too many and I left him. The breakup was horrendous, and I still have no idea how I managed to hide it all from my family and friends. But we become good at that, don’t we Will?”

Will let out a shaky breath and didn’t reply.

“Look, I can only go on what my dad has said, and I have to assume you’re going through the same. Or worse. Please listen to me, you won’t change him. This won’t get better. It will only get worse. You’re in danger Will-”

Will hung up the phone.

His face was wet with silent tears and his chest was tight. He thumbed through and blocked the number on his phone so Randall couldn’t call again.

*

“Who the fucks number is this?!” Matt practically screamed in his face and Will recoiled.

He was still in bed, it was early. The sun wasn't quite making it through the curtains, and Matt was leaning over the bed, pressing him down into the mattress as he screamed in his face.

It took Will a moment to catch his breath and wake enough to understand what was happening.

"I don't-" Will started, but Matt cut him off, pushing his shoulders hard enough into the bed to jar Will's back.

"Don't nothing. You fucking know what I'm talking about. You have a call on your phone from last night. And now the number is blocked. Is that how you do it, huh? Is that how you fuck around on me and then hide the evidence? Not so fucking smart now are you!" Matt menaced the words at him.

The sharp slap across his face took Will's breath away.

"Matt, please…"

"I knew I shouldn't have let you have a phone. I've made that mistake in the past. But I thought I could trust you, Will." Matt's face was contorted with rage. "I told you when we moved in together, you wouldn't need your own phone. I should have known!"

This was worse than Matt had ever been before. And whilst Will knew the likelihood was that Matt would apologise and make it up to him once it was all over, this time he was going to get really hurt.

"It's not like that Matty, I promise." Will begged. "It was Jack's son, Randall. He-"

"What the fuck?!" Matt didn't let him finish, gripping his hair and dragging him from the bed and onto the floor. Will went down with a thud that sent a shock of pain through his bones. He grabbed at Matt's hand, but didn't dare try and remove it from his scalp no matter how painful it was.

"No, Matty, I promise. He called. Jack stuck his nose into my business and asked Randall to do the same. I-"

"Randy is a fucking trouble maker. Did he try and get you away from me? Huh? Did he invite you over for a fuck?"

Will cried out as Matt shook him by the hair, some of the hair ripping loose from Will's scalp.

"I'm not going to stand for this shit anymore, Will. I've treated you with nothing but respect, I don't deserve this bullshit."

Will cried out again as Matt pulled him up by the hair and to his feet.

"You need to learn your lesson, Will."

*

“What the fuck? Will!”

Jack’s voice was muffled but it was him. Will breathed a sigh of relief as his legs went out from under him. He fell to the floor in the garage, his body surrendering now that the adrenaline was gone.

“Will!” Another voice, this time Barney.

Will felt himself being dragged into someone’s lap, cradled against a comforting form. Jack, he realised when he felt as much as heard the warm, booming voice tell Barney to call an ambulance.

Will couldn’t see much, both eyes almost completely swollen shut. He wasn’t even sure how he’d made the walk from the apartment to the garage. He just knew that he’d had to.

After Matt had beaten him, he put Will back to bed and told him to call in sick. Then Matt left for work and Will forced himself, bloodied and bruised, to pull on a sweater and some jeans and make his way to work. To the safety of the family he had there.

“That fucking bastard. I’ll kill him, I’ll fucking kill him.” Will could hear Jack’s muttered words as he stroked the bloodied hair back from Will’s face.

Will wanted to try to protest, but there were no words. Instead he lay there, finally safe, as he could hear the ambulance sirens in the distance.

*

Will didn’t remember the ambulance.

He must have blacked out before they arrived. He had flashes of memory of moving, being laid out and rocked around in the back of a vehicle whilst Jack held his hand. But they were only fleeting and gone as soon as he tried to focus on them.

He knew he was in the hospital now. Felt the gurney being wheeled through bright corridors, the ceiling lights hurting his eyes despite them being closed. He tried to sob but the action caused a sharp pain through his chest.

When he came-to properly, the back of the bed had been pushed up so that he wasn’t flat on his back anymore, and Jack was there, talking in hushed tones to someone else. A figure in a white coat.

Will could just about make out Jack’s words, they were hushed but the anger was unmistakable, as he relayed his knowledge of what had happened to the doctor. Including his assumptions that Matt had done this.

Will felt anguish at the words. He wanted to deny them and say that they had Matt all wrong, and he should have just been a better boyfriend. But it was hard to deny what had happened. So many times in the past he had made excuses for Matt’s behaviour. But this?

The two men suddenly went quiet and Will knew they must have realised he was now awake. They came over to the bedside and Jack took his hand again, making Will wince. He wasn't sure that there was a single part of his body that wasn't bruised.

"Good morning Mr Graham, I'm Doctor Lecter." The doctor addressed him with a smooth European accent, standing on the other side of the bed to Jack and starting to look over his notes, the machines and then at Will himself. "You've suffered quite extensive injuries, I'm glad your friend was able to bring you in."

Will swallowed and it hurt. That was apparently clear as the doctor hung up the notes and grabbed the water cup from the side, placing the straw gently to Will's lips. He sucked, an odd sensation given that his lips were actually numb of any feeling, but his throat was raw and aching. These were only momentary concerns given the shooting pain in his jaw at the action.

After a few sips he stopped, sinking back into the pillows, exhausted with the little effort it had taken.

"Some of your injuries just require time to heal, however others we will need to monitor and possibly operate. From the X-rays you had on arrival, you appear to have two broken ribs and a fractured jaw. I've got you on the list for an MRI scan later today so that we can really see the extent of bone damage and whether we will need to go in and remove any splintered bone. If we need to pin or plate anything."

Will took a shuddering breath and felt Jack squeeze his hand.

He was muttering again, Will could just make out 'bastard' under Jack's breath as he shook his head. Jack was so angry. Will just felt numb.

"Now, don't try to talk. Please remain still. We've given you quite a lot of painkillers, but given the extent of your injuries you're still likely to feel some pain. I'm going to have a nurse monitor you, and there is this button if you need anything."

Will felt the doctor press a call button into his hand, but was unable to respond beyond the slightest nod.

"Don't worry Mr Graham, you're in good hands here. And," the doctor hesitated for a moment, before continuing in a compassionate tone, "we can inform the police as soon as you are ready to give a statement."

Will drew a sharp breath at that and tried to shake his head, but it hurt too much.

Jack squeezed his hand again, rubbing his other hand gently up Will's arm, "It's okay Will. You don't need to think about any of that right now. You just need to get better."

"Absolutely, as Mr Crawford says." The doctor agreed with a comforting smile.

Will tried to even his breathing and lay back into the bed. Press charges? Against Matt?

It seemed like such an insane thing to do. How would Matt ever forgive him if he did? But then, what Matt had done was wrong. If he wanted to press charges then he and Matt were over for sure.

Will felt a sob bubble up in his chest, followed by a pain through his ribs. A reminder that there were many reasons why he should no longer be with Matt. He just wasn't sure he was strong enough any more to listen to those.

The curtain pulled back slightly and Will startled, letting out a little cry at the pain it caused. He thought it would be Matty, and he realised he was truly terrified of that being the case. Would he just drag him back home if he found him?

He could already imagine that Matt was going insane, maybe even smashing up the apartment, once he'd got home to find Will gone. Will was just glad that Jack had the foresight to bring him to a different hospital than the one Matt worked at.

Silent tears started to roll down Will's face, running into the cuts and scrapes that had been too small to be bandaged up like the rest of him. It stang.

"Oh, Will."

It was Phyllis Crawford that had come through the curtain. She rushed to his side, practically pushing the doctor out of the way, before coming to a halt. He could tell she wanted to take him into an embrace, but had realised that it would be painful for Will to be touched. So she settled for taking his hand, buzzer and all, and holding it as her husband was.

"I'll leave you for now, please as I said, call myself or one of the nurses if you need anything."

Jack and Phyllis thanked the doctor, whilst Will's tears continued to flow.

*

Hannibal Lecter practically growled as he resisted the urge to slam the patient notes down on the nurse's station. He wouldn't do it of course. Much too in control to let even these emotions run over. But clearly he was giving off enough of anger that one of the nurses swerved from the station to avoid him.

"What's eating you?" His colleague Doctor Sutcliffe approached from the side corridor and placed down his own notes, his eyes tracking the nurse he'd scared off. "You already intimidate the staff here, don't start scaring them as well."

Hannibal shook his head. Most of the time he was completely detached from patients. It's what would serve him well as a surgeon, he knew, once his ER residency was up. But on rare occasions, they got to him. In fact he could only recall two other times since he had trained at John Hopkins.

Will Graham made a third.

The third since Mischa to crack his armour. The aloof and superior nature he wore around him.

“I don’t like abuse,” He restrained himself from growling the words.

Sutcliffe let out a small chuckle, “Of course not. Who does?” He eyed Hannibal thoughtfully, “Pretty bad one, huh?”

Hannibal took a breath and nodded. “It’s a wonder the young man hasn’t been permanently disfigured. There’s not an inch of his body that wasn’t beaten black and blue.”

Hannibal couldn’t help but wonder what would have happened to the boy if he hadn’t been brought in. Crawford had explained what had happened to the best of his knowledge, so Hannibal had to assume that, had Will Graham not made his way to his friends, staying at home instead - it might have only taken one wrong move to puncture his lung.

“He could have been killed.” Hannibal’s voice was level now, back to dispassionate and professional.

Sutcliffe clasped a hand on his shoulder, “These things happen,” he said. And whilst Hannibal knew that the doctor was trying to be calming, the choice of words left a little to be desired.

“They shouldn’t” Hannibal answered cooly, shrugging off Sutcliffe’s hand and getting back to work. He had to make the calls to get Will Graham up for his MRI.

*

Will had never been claustrophobic in the past, but being slowly inched into the MRI machine was terrifying. Perhaps it was the feeling of having no control in that space, having to remain still. A difficult task when he was trying not to sob at the parallels with he and Matt. His mind then flashing to memories of the car wreck, of the stag man, of being trapped in metal. And when he tried to pull back from those he was only swamped with more of Matt.

He tried to work out where it had all gone wrong, it had been great in the beginning hadn't it? Hadn't it been amazing at some point? It was so hard to remember now, with everything that had happened since. All the things that now clouded Will's mind. With the benefit of being wholly removed from the situation, Will felt his chest tighten with each realisation and memory.

Will felt as though that antlered creature from his nightmares was looming over him, stealing the air from his lungs.

"Mr Graham, you need to remain still, is everything okay?" A voice came over the speaker system in the MRI suite. He recognised it as the voice of the MRI tech he'd meet briefly whilst being wheeled through.

Before Will could process the question, another voice came over the speaker. Soft and warm, it felt like a calming force, enveloping him and holding him still.

"It's alright, Will. Just relax, it'll only take a few moments. Close your eyes and relax." Despite being easier said than done, Doctor Lecter's soothing tone helped, and Will calmed enough to lay still as the scanner started to work.

When the scan was done and Will was wheeled back out of the MRI suite, he took the opportunity to talk to Doctor Lecter, whilst he walked at Will's side.

"I'm sorry, about nearly freaking out." Will apologised through his aching jaw, barely able to get the words out through the pain. Lecter lay a hand lightly on his shoulder as they continued to move down the corridor. "I have this, um. I have nightmares about a tall man with antlers growing out of his head, ever since my mother…" He started trying to explain and then finished with, "I guess I get claustrophobic."

"It's quite alright, Will. We surround ourselves every day with modern technology, but really our instincts are still quite primitive. There is nothing natural about being in a magnetic tube full of lights and noises. Even the most prepared often have a reaction to such a scan. You did well."

Lecter squeezed his shoulder ever so gently and then let go.

Will felt comforted. He felt safe.

*

"Your patient, Doctor Lecter." The duty nurse tapped him on the shoulder as she spoke, drawing his attention. She knew him well enough to know his focus was often absolute, as it had been in this case.

Hannibal looked up from the patient notes he was reviewing and saw a nurse rushing into Will Graham's cubicle. The young man had been with them three days now, most of which Hannibal had been on shift and able to follow his progress. He was recovering well, though it was likely the swelling and bruises all over his face and body would still be prominent by the time he was well enough for release. Either way, he'd be removed to a recovery ward in the morning for at least a few days, discharged from Hannibal's care.

He looked at the alarms and saw none were flashing, didn't hear any either. So Will hadn't pressed his call button and nor was he experiencing a medical emergency that would set off the monitors. He waited a moment, straining to hear what was happening in the cubicle over the usual busy sounds of the ER ward, even this late in the evening.

He was due to start his rounds, so if it wasn't an emergency, he should let others deal with it. A difficult task considering how invested he felt in the young man's situation. Both unusual and uncharacteristic for him, he considered, until remembering his sister. When they were children they had been separated at the orphanage and when he found her a few years later, discovered that she had been horribly abused by the family she had been placed with. She was happy and healthy now, thanks to his interference, but it had left him with something of a weakness for people in a similar situation.

There was something about Will Graham and what had happened to him, that made Hannibal want to step in, as he had with Mischa.

He steeled himself, giving a curt nod to the nurse and going back to his notes. He knew how highly inappropriate it might seem if he was seen to be taking an unnecessary level of interest in the young man. He'd seen what other LGBTQ colleagues had been through, right or wrong. Almost always wrongly.

Those in the position of hiring and firing couldn't be seen to have any prejudice, but he knew from experience that it only took one wrong step to be put under investigation and then easily dismissed, despite the findings. Because then the reputational damage was already done. It would only take one nurse or orderly, or worse, another doctor, gossiping about any favour he showed a male patient, to open himself up to risk.

So Hannibal stayed where he was, until the alarm sounded.

It was the call button, not a monitor, so that was potentially a better scenario for his patient. One of the nurses must have pressed it. So he heeded the call.

Hannibal took a quick stride towards the cubicle and then slipped in through the curtain, the nurse looking at him immediately.

"I thought he was fitting." She explained, an apologetic tone. “But…”

He clearly wasn't, but Hannibal could see why she thought so. Will was incredibly agitated and clearing having a nightmare.

"It's okay, you can-" The nurse started, the dismissal clear. Hannibal interrupted her.

"It's quite alright, he was third on my rounds anyway. I'll just start here." Hannibal said, walking forward until he was next to the bed.

The nurse nodded and turned off the call alarm before exiting the cubicle.

Hannibal placed a hand on Will's shoulder.

"Will, can you hear me? You're having a bad dream." Hannibal kept his tone low and comforting, moving his hand to take Will's pulse and placing the other on the young man's forehead. He was hot and sweaty, his heart racing, but nothing out of the ordinary for someone trapped in a nightmare. No cause for medical concern, Hannibal's worry was more psychological.

"Will, I need you to wake up for me," Hannibal said, firm words but soft tone.

Will made a few noises of distress and writhed for a moment, dislodging Hannibal's hand, which he then withdrew. Will repeated the same movements, but this time the noises formed words. *No*, and *dad*.

Hannibal's blood ran cold, wondering if Will Graham had also suffered abuse at the hands of family members. He let out a sharp breath before placing a hand on Will's shoulder again.

"You're safe here Will, come on. Come back to us."

Another anguished noise and Will Graham attempted to sit upright in the bed. Suddenly awake and shaking and now in agony. Hannibal was sure that normarily Will would bolt upright in bed and try to regain his equilibrium. Here his body attempted to perform the usual action, and instead was wracked with pain from his injuries which then made him collapse back onto the bed with a sharp cry of pain.

Will's eyes were wide and he was clearly panicked. An unfamiliar and sterile place to wake in.

"You're in the hospital, Will. Do you remember? I'm Doctor Lecter."

"Doctor Lecter," Will repeated the name as best he could his injured jaw. His eyes still searching the room and resolutely not looking at the doctor.

Hannibal turned when he heard the cubicle curtain slide open to reveal the duty nurse, looking at him expectantly.

"Mr Graham is in distress." He informed her, before rattling off the medications he wanted brought through.

The nurse nodded, pulling the curtain back into place as she started off at a clip.

Hannibal stood close to the bed, almost leaning over Will as he spoke, trying to create some semblance of safety in his moment of trauma relived.

"I promise you're safe, Will. We'll give you something for the pain and to relax you so you can get some good sleep."

Will's breathing was levelling out though his eyes were still wide. After a moment, finally, he made eye contact with Hannibal and nodded.

Hannibal gave a gentle smile and put a little pressure on Will's shoulder before stepping back again.

The nurse was there then, a small tray with everything Hannibal had asked for. She left again once Hannibal had administered the drugs and passed back the used sharps.

"Are you alright? Would you like me to have someone come and sit with you?" Hannibal asked.

Will shook his head, looking a little pained. Hannibal knew that look from Mischa, when she thought she was being too much trouble or putting someone out, because she'd been made to think that she wasn't worth anyone's consideration.

"It's not a problem," Hannibal continued, trying to offer reassurance.

"Thanks, I'm okay. I'm… I'm used to it. I get nightmares a lot. Always have." Will's speech was slurred by his injuries and the discomfort it caused him to talk was very apparent.

Even so, he continued despite himself. "You cried out dad. If you have past trauma that you'd like to discuss, I can have someone come by to-"

"No," Will cut him off,. Despite the swelling and discolouration, Hannibal could see that Will's face was flustered and he was frowning.

"I apologise, Will. I didn't mean to overstep." Hannibal moved to the other side of the bed in silence and checked the monitors, writing on Will's notes and completing information for his rounds as Will scowled at him in silence.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Time to get Matt out of the picture.

Hannibal woke with a start.

It was his first night sleeping in his own bed for almost a week. Rather than just grabbing some sleep in the staff room between shifts, as it just wasn't worth the trip home. He had slept soundly there, mostly because he was so exhausted by the time he had chance to settle down.

Tonight he had been exhausted enough to fall asleep just fine. But the bedside clock told him that sleep had lasted little more than three hours.

He was still trembling from the dream. A nightmare really. He hadn't had one since…

Mischa.

He'd had nightmares as a child, after they were first separated. Not just about her but his parents too.

After he had found her and brought her to live with him, rescuing her from the abuse she had suffered, he'd had nightmares almost every night those first few weeks. Just like this one, in most ways. The lack of breath, the immobility and inability to do anything, but now with something else. An entity that was not his own but had been put in his mind by a patient.

A tall, antlered man, had loomed over him and sat on his chest. Restricting him. Stopping him from being able to move or scream or even breath. It kept him there immobile, unable to act as others in his dream suffered. He had felt this way before in those dreams, but it had been an invisible force crushing him, not this monster.

And that wasn't the only change to his dream. The person he was trying to get to, to save, hadn't been Mischa, it had been Will Graham.

Hannibal let out a shuddering breath and sat up, feeling the sweat stick the silk of his pyjamas to his skin. He pushed a hand up into his damp hair and pushed that back from his eyes.

The sheets were likewise sodden, but he was too bone weary to care. He'd have a shower and then retire to a guest room and worry about it in the morning.

He didn't move immediately, despite meaning to. Instead, he sat there, feeling as though his body were weak and fragile. Useless.

It was the exhaustion from so many endless shifts in the ER, but it felt like it was the damnable creature still crushing him, rendering him completely impotent.

In his dream, Will had been dreaming. Laying in bed next to him and having a nightmare whilst Hannibal was unable to make any move to help him. A flash of the rest of the dream came back to Hannibal and he shivered. The creature that had sat on his chest and kept him from moving, had started to choke Will. Will continued to sleep and cry out in agony and there was nothing Hannibal could do to draw him from the nightmare, trapped as he was in his own.

Hannibal took a deep, leveling breath. It was work, he told himself again. If it hadn't been Will Graham, it would have been someone else in his dream. Someone who's circumstances equally reminded him of what Mischa had gone through. Of what he had been unable to protect her from for so many years.

That's what Hannibal told himself. Trying to convince himself that Will's situation hadn't got him more invested than he perhaps would with other patients. He prided himself in remaining aloof and disconnected. Some patients appreciated his bluntness, others complained of his lack of bedside manner. But if he liked to think he were made of ice, he found himself thawing somewhat around Will Graham. His situation tapping into that deep instinct Hannibal had to nurture and protect, one reserved for Mischa alone.

Hannibal groaned as he moved to the edge of the bed and swung his legs over. He truly was exhausted and this late night awakening wasn't great.

Working the ER was draining, physically and emotionally, but he had a strange feeling he might miss it once he was residency was up and he moved into the surgical position he had been accepted to. It had become second nature to him now. But then, so had every stage of his life before it had changed again. It would become ingrained, be the way he lived - the way he survived, like back in the orphanage. And then it would change again.

Hannibal let out a deep breath and dragged himself from his bed to the shower. Trying not to think about Will Graham.

*

Will wished that he was able to see better, because he was sure the ward he had been moved to was nice. It felt warm and everything was white, but it was hard to see details with his eyes still so swollen.

It was fairly quiet, a lot of the other occupants being elderly and sleeping. He had the room at the end which had a window close to his bed. He could see green out there, though it was still a blur, especially at the distance.

A few more days of bed rest, and then they were going to let him home.

Home.

Will shuddered. He wondered if Jack and Phyllis would let him stay for a while. At least until he sorted things out with Matty. He was likely to be really mad about all of this.

Will was still in a lot of pain, and there was only so much they could bandage or plaster, and his ribs and jaw weren't exactly easy places to do that. He'd had a small operation to put a wire in his jaw, closing the fracture, and that had left him even more pain.

But that wasn't the worst of it.

Will wasn't vain, but there was something truly frightening about leaving the hospital looking like this. Still all swollen and battered. He knew people would stare and talk, and the thought already had him on edge. They'd taken his catheter out that morning, and when he used the bathroom his reflection in the mirror terrified him.

Will looked down at the mush that was his breakfast, and wondered when he'd even be able to eat properly again. It just felt like it wouldn't easily all go back to normal.

If Matty wasn't too mad and did let him come home, would he get pissed off having to make soup if Will was still in too much pain to make his own food?

Will's attention was drawn by a light knock at his door. Then a head poked around to see if he was awake.

"Doctor Lecter?" The words came out muffled, and he winced at the pain.

Will wasn't sure why the man was there, he'd been transferred from ER and hadn't expected to see him again. Not that he minded, there was something he liked about him, the way he made Will feel safe.

"Good morning Will, I thought I'd just drop in and check on you."

Will frowned as best he could with all the pain and swelling, and then shrugged. He picked up the notebook Jack had left him the previous evening, and jotted down a few quick words.

'Okay I guess. I thought you were just an ER doctor?'

There was a slight trill of fear through him, first wondering if there was something wrong. And then terrified that he'd done something to catch the man's interest, something that Matt would hate.

He clenched his jaw from habit and felt the burn of pain. He winced again and part of him resented the doctor being there, his having to communicate in this way. That ire pushing down the way the doctor made him feel, a way that he didn't want to feel.

Lecter nodded his head and Will could make out a smile with him stood so close.

"Quite right. I do sometimes like to check in with patients that are still admitted though, and my shift doesn't start for twenty minutes, so I thought I'd take the opportunity."

Will gave a slight smile, as much as he could manage with the pain, wanting to be polite. But unable to let himself feel the emotions behind it. Realising how scared he was now, to even remotely seem friendly towards someone other than Matt.

“May I?” Lecter pointed at the chair beside his bed and Will froze for a moment. Finally he gave a slight nod.

Lecter took the seat, a move that made it clear this was not a professional visit. He wasn’t there as Will’s doctor. And he wasn’t planning a fleeting visit.

So Will waited, sure that something was coming next.

“Will, I wanted to speak with you before you were discharged. I wanted to let you know, there is help out there. I could… I’d like to get someone to come and talk to you about options when you leave. You don’t have to go back to-” The tone of his voice was interesting. As much as Will found a comfort in his presence that he didn’t want to, usually he sounded aloof and professional. But Will could feel the struggle in his words, trying to maintain that distance and not express the emotions he was actually experiencing over this. Over Will’s situation.

It upset Will. He didn’t want to have this conversation and especially not when it was uncomfortable for both of them, to say the least.

“Stop.” Will forced out the word, his body shaking in anger.

“I understand this can be hard to hear. Domestic violence is-” Lecter tried to continue emotion gone now and a colder tone than before, but Will cut him off again.

“No. Just, stop.” Will flinched at the pain caused by his tensing up.

Lecter did, remaining silent for a moment before clearing his throat and rising to his feet.

“I apologise, Will. It was not my intention to distress you. I’ll have a nurse bring you some more pain meds.”

Will managed another nod, trying not to grit his teeth.

Doctor Lecter let himself out.

*

Will had been dozing after a small hit of morphine, but woke when he heard the voice out in the corridor, before his door handle started to slowly move.

Matt.

Will’s chest tightened and his breath caught in his throat. His cheeks flushed even as the rest of him felt cold, as though the blood was draining from his body.

His heart was thumping, blood rushing so fast around his body that he could hear it in his ears. It was all he *could* hear.

All except Matt's voice cutting through. Telling someone he was a friend come to visit, opening the door…

Will recoiled back in the bed when Matt stepped in, his grin wide.

"Will, here you are. I've been looking for you baby, you should have called." The look of concern in Matt's eyes seemed completely insincere, especially as he was still grinning.

Will swallowed, wanting to cry out. He looked to the side of the bed, the call button was there but he couldn't reach for it with Matt striding towards him. The door closing behind him.

"Lucky one of my buddies recognised you," Matt ground out the words, frowning now.

And of course, Will should have thought of that. Matt was an orderly at the other hospital in the city, and knew plenty of other emergency department staff. Will hadn't considered it before and now it made him feel exposed and vulnerable.

Every fibre of his being was telling him to run, to escape. And yet his mind was still at war, trying to reconcile the monster that Matt was, with the man Will wanted to be with.

Could Matt have really done this to him? He must have done something to provoke him. He always did. It was always his own fault.

Even as Will thought this he knew it wasn't true. And yet, why else would he have stayed with him so long? Matt loved him. Didn't he?

Will took a trembling breath and felt tears at the corner of his eyes. From the fear as much as anything. Made worse when Matt reached up a hand to gently wipe the tears away.

"My poor baby, let's see about getting you home." Matt turned back towards the door and Will stifled a cry of sudden anguish at the thought of going anywhere with him.

He was terrified.

There was no over stating it, he truly feared for his safety and there was no more denying it. No more excuses he could make as he felt the tears sting the raw and beaten flesh of his face.

When it became clear that Matt was heading back out to find someone to discuss Will leaving, Will reached over and pressed the call button.

And then waited. His heart thumping as Matt turned back and looked at him curiously.

"I can go find someone, baby." Matt said, but then his frown returned and Will was sure he could read his expression even through the swelling. He could see the fear.

*

Hannibal paced the staff room for a few minutes after his shift ended, trying to decide whether to talk to Will Graham again. He didn't like being agitated like this, and knew it was his own fault for clearly broaching the subject of official intervention when Will wasn't ready. He should have known better from Mischa. How he'd had to handle her with kid gloves.

But the man was clearly in danger and Hannibal couldn't help his mind going time and again to Mischa. The fingerprint bruises on the tops of her arms, the darkness that was a healing black eye.

Hannibal shuddered, unable to stop thinking about her, and in turn about Will Graham and how the next time he ended up in here it might be in a body bag and not on a gurney.

"Didn't your shift finally end? Shouldn't you be going home?" Sutcliffe asked as he ambled into the room and grabbed the coffee pot, pouring himself a long cup of the half warm brew.

He wore a pleasant enough expression but was staring intently at Hannibal, who knew Sutcliffe likely suspected what was going on. He'd never really seen Hannibal like this, none of them there had. But Sutcliffe knew him well enough for him to have shared a little information about his sister.

"Okay, tell Uncle Donald," Sutcliffe said, a slight exasperation as he placed his coffee mug on the counter.

Hannibal shook his head. "I tried to talk to Will Graham about getting help."

"Hannibal," his name came out as a long drawn admonishment. "You can't… If he doesn't want to be helped there is only so much you can do, you know that."

"And the alternative is that next time he bypasses ER and goes straight to the morgue?" Hannibal tried to deliver the words as cold and aloof as normal, but wasn't quite she he entirely managed it.

Sutcliffe shrugged, "You can report it, but even then there isn't much anyone can do unless he wants them to. I'm sorry my friend, it's just a sad truth."

Hannibal nodded, knowing Sutcliffe was right, even as bile burned inside him.

Hannibal took off his coat and stethoscope, stowing them and grabbing his suit jacket from his locker.

He had every intention of going straight home, but as he reached the last set of doors between him and the outside world, he glanced down the corridor. The elevators were right there, it would take him only a moment to pop in again. To apologise for upsetting the man, if nothing else. Though he remained hopeful of being able to change Mr Graham's mind on seeking help.

*

"I'm sorry Mr Brown, I'm going to have to ask you to leave."

Hannibal heard the nurse inside Will's room before he got to the open door. Inside the scene was troubling.

Brown, evidently the boyfriend if Will Graham's reaction was anything to go by, stood looming over the bed, a hand protectively on Will's shoulder. Or so it might look.

On closer inspection, Hannibal could see fingers digging in, holding Will painfully in place as the man cowered in his bed.

"Why are you sorry?" Brown answered, a brattish quality to his tone that made Hannibal's jaw clench. "Nothing to be sorry about, I'm just asking you to get Will's stuff so we can go."

"I've told you Mr Brown, Mr Graham is still under observation, he cannot be discharged without the doctor's-"

"Is everything alright here?" Hannibal asked as he entered the room, his heart thumping with rage, his eyes trained on the fingers digging painfully into Will.

"You the doctor?" Brown asked, looking him up and down.

"I am." Hannibal replied. "Why don't we discuss this in the corridor so that Will can rest?"

"Will," Brown mused the name, rolling it over in his mouth, as he narrowed his eyes at Hannibal. It didn't take a genius to work out what Brown was thinking. "On first name terms, huh?"

Hannibal swallowed, realising that he may have just inadvertently made the situation more volatile but was not about to back down. He fixed Brown with a cold look of his own, one that he knew intimidated almost everyone around him.

Hannibal didn't look away as he spoke to the nurse, "You can go now, I'll take care of this." As though nothing were wrong, whilst fully knowing she would go and alert hospital security.

When he turned back to Brown, the man was growling words close to Will's ear as Will cowered away from him. Hannibal could make out enough to know the jealous accusations that him calling Will by his first name had provoked.

"Mr Graham is my patient, and he needs to rest now I'm afraid." Hannibal continued gently, as though talking to a perfectly sound visitor. "I can find out the visiting hours for tomorrow if you'd like?"

Brown sneered and huffed at him, as though he thought Hannibal was a moron.

"Don't need visiting hours, Will's leaving. Now." Brown cocked a brow as he spoke and then turned to Will, starting to pull him to the edge of the bed, even as Will cried out in pain.

"I must insist you stop," Hannibal growled the words as he strode forward, intent on putting himself between Brown and the patient.

“Please Matty,” Will slurred and sobbed the plea.

Brown gave a sharp tug then which had Will screaming, and so Hannibal grabbed his arm, pulling it sharply away so that Will was beyond his reach.

“Like that is it?” Brown hissed as he shook his arm loose from Hannibal’s grip. They stood staring each other down at the edge of the bed. “I could get you struck off for fucking my boyfriend. He’s your fucking patient you sick fuck. That’s abuse of power or some shit.”

Hannibal’s blood boiled, not just at the unprofessional accusation, but at everything it meant. What it said about what Will had been living with. Brown likely suspected Will of having slept with any man he’d even made the slightest conversation with.

“Mr Brown, you need to leave.”

“Fuck you,” Brown spat the words and lunged for Will.

Hannibal stepped in his path, meeting his solid form so that they both bounced back from each other. Brown was surprisingly robust and Hannibal was sure he was likely incredibly muscular under his loose fitting shirt. Brown recovered first, this time lunging at Hannibal with a growl and swinging a punch.

Will made terrified and plaintive noises, as they grappled with each other.

Finally pushing apart again, Hannibal blocked a hastily thrown punch. The motion making him knock into Will’s bed, catching him off guard and allowing Brown to land a punch on his jaw.

Hannibal shook his head, about to retaliate when heavy foot falls could be heard rushing the corridor, and two members of security burst into the room and immediately grabbed Brown. They had him on the floor as Hannibal cupped his sore jaw and tongued at his broken and bloody lower lip.

Brown was shouting and screaming abuse at him, at Will, at the security guards, as he was hauled into the corridor.

Hannibal turned to Will, the man was shaking like a leaf and the nurse rushed back to check him over and make sure he was okay, followed closely by Will’s actual doctor.

When Hannibal stepped towards him too, Will gave him a sharp look.

“Please, leave me alone,” He pleaded, barely able to mumble the words because of his jaw and all the more obscured by his sobbing. But Hannibal understood well enough and gave a slight nod, before starting out of the room.

Security had Brown at the end of the corridor by then and Hannibal could hear them calling through to the police.

Hannibal let out a heavy sigh and leaned against the wall. Perhaps that would have happened anyway, but he felt somewhat responsible for what had just happened. If he hadn’t come to

see Will and set Brown off. Not that it mattered now.

All Hannibal was concerned about was Will Graham's health and safety. And whilst there was nothing he could do in that moment to help or console the man, Hannibal knew something he was now in a position to assist with whether Will wanted it or not.

Hannibal swiped the blood from his lip with his thumb and looked at it.

He was going to press charges against Mr Brown.

*

Will woke groggy. He wasn't sure what the nurse had given him, but it had calmed him and allowed him to drift into a dreamless sleep.

Waking in the hospital bed was a little disorienting and, as all the events of the last few days came back to him, Will wondered if he had dreamt Matt coming to see him.

More a nightmare than a dream.

He shuddered at the thought. With fear, he realised. Fear he had been denying for a long time.

"You're awake," The orderly smiled sweetly as she brought in a breakfast tray and set it on his little table. "Wait a moment," She continued as she saw Will struggling to sit up. She moved to the bed and pressed the button that pushed the head of the bed up, as she fluffed his pillows a little behind him.

Will smiled weakly when she finished and then pulled over his tray table.

"Eat what you can, but you might feel a little ill if you have too much. Side effect from the medication you were given last night."

Will nodded and tried for another smile but it hurt his face and he wasn't even sure it showed amongst the swelling and bruises.

"Can I see Doctor Lecter?" Will managed to mumble the words through his aching jaw as he played the small spoon over in his plain yoghurt.

"The ER doctor? I can see if he can pop up. Not sure when he's on shift, but I can leave a message." She smiled pleasantly again, as she fussed around the room, setting out fresh water and straw for him.

Then she checked her watch.

"I better get along, I'll be back for your tray in a short while. And don't worry, I'll leave a note for Doctor Lecter for you."

She patted his leg ever so gently and then left the room.

Will sank into his pillows, pushing the tray away as much as he could. She was right, he did feel a little sick, but moreover he felt guilty.

He felt responsible for what had happened to Doctor Lecter. The man would never have been hit if he'd just agreed to go with Matt. Or if he hadn't upset Matt.

And Will had sent him away. Angry and overwhelmed at the time, when he should have apologised and thanked him.

Will shuddered as he remembered Matt tugging painfully at him, Matt lunging for him. He wondered if Matt would have given him more bruises if the doctor and nurse hadn't intervened.

Will drifted back off to sleep. When he woke his tray had been taken but the juice and a small bowl of soft fruit remained.

After a restless sleep, filled with nonsensical images of red and blurred flesh, Will just wanted to go home. He wanted his own bed, his own room where he could curl up and hide from everything until he felt like he could face the world again. If he ever felt that he could.

The thought brought a small cry of emotional pain to his lips. He thought about the basic but homely little studio apartment he'd rented when he first left his dad's house, before he'd moved in with Matt. Before he'd given that up, and now he had nowhere.

Tears started to silently roll down his cheeks, the salt painful over the battered skin, and Will found he didn't care. There was a part of him that felt he deserved that pain.

"Mr Graham?"

Doctor Lecter's head appeared around the door, and he smiled softly at Will when he saw Will was awake.

"May I come in?"

Will nodded and Lecter stepped into the room, pressing the door quietly closed behind him. Will studied him as he stepped towards the bed. His jaw bore the mark of a fist, mostly red but bruising at the edges, the cut on his lip was a little swollen.

"I'm sorry," Will said at the sight of it, and Lecter clearly tracked where his eyes were focused.

The doctor cupped his own jaw for a moment before replying, "I've been telling patients that things got out of hand in my Jeet Kune Do class." He chuckled, clearly trying to set Will at ease.

Will tried to force a smile, but through the pain and lack of intent behind it, he didn't quite manage.

"How are you feeling?" Lecter asked, his humour replaced with concern, and a little coldness. As though he was retreating into himself, Will realised. For a moment he felt as though

Lecter was usually cold and he'd melted him a little, but then shook away the thought of having such an impact on someone.

Will tried to shrug but then winced at the effort. Lecter nodded.

"It's going to take a little while to heal up, you'll be tender for some time.

Will nodded.

When silence fell between them Lecter looked over Will's notes, not looking up as he said, "I had a message at the nurse's station that you wanted to see me?"

Will let out a shaky breath and nodded.

He wanted to apologise for Matt, and for his own part in what had happened. But instead he found himself saying, "I need help. I… don't want to go back to Matt."

Lecter looked at him then - cracks in his armour again - and the relief was palpable.

*

Hannibal had to admit he was glad of the few days off. He didn't always get them off together, but after days of back to back shifts and being punched in the face, he felt it was deserved. Maybe the rota had been drawn up with this in mind, and he wasn't going to knock it.

He'd slept late, showered, spent some time pottering around the house and garden before starting lunch going. It was only a simple pasta dish and he wouldn't have bothered with more than a sandwich if he Mischa wasn't coming over.

It was Sunday and she had jumped at the chance to visit when she discovered her brother had a rare weekend off.

He understood, of course, it was nearly a two hour drive from where she lived with her husband, so it was nice to have it worth her while to come by. The weather was perfect, so they could eat in the garden and relax, catch up.

Of course she started fussing as soon as she arrived, first over his injuries, which he shrugged off. And then trying to help in the kitchen but only getting underfoot, until he gave her the cutlery to take out to the garden dining suite.

When he brought the plates out, she was redoing the flower arrangement in the centre of the table and he gave her a combination frown and raised brow, an expression reserved only for her.

She smiled up at him and sat back so he could put her plate in front of her, before setting down his own and taking a seat.

As always, Mischa tucked straight into the food as though she hadn't been fed in days. Hannibal knew not to take it as a compliment on his cooking, but as a left over from her time

in care. From the neglect she had suffered. The orphanage hadn't been much better, but Hannibal had schooled himself over the years, and of course, therapy had helped.

Thinking of the abuse they had both suffered as children, and especially Mischa, Hannibal couldn't help but think about Will Graham.

"You look pensive," Mischa commented before taking another bite of food,

Her words shook Hannibal back to the here and now, and he merely smiled. "Just a… very long week."

Mischa cocked a brow that was too much like looking in a mirror, "Long enough to have been punched in the face. What on earth did you do to warrant that? Upstaging a fellow doctor or annoying a patient?" She tried to hide her grin, rather unsuccessfully.

"Neither," Hannibal replied before lifting his wine glass and taking a long sip.

He had of course told her that he had been injured, though the bruising had gone down quite a bit, so as not to shock her when she arrived. But he hadn't given further details, not wanting her to be alarmed. She could be quite sensitive over such things, understandably he felt.

"I was hit by the abusive boyfriend of a patient. I stepped between them." Hannibal said plainly before taking another sip and watching the look of concern fleet across her face before she, expertly, hid it.

"Very noble, I'm sure. Though reckless," Her scalding was light, meant deeply meant. "Isn't that why hospitals employ security personnel?"

"They were enroute. And I didn't feel that I could stand by and let the patient be abused." Hannibal explained gently.

She considered for a moment and then gave a slight nod, acquiescing. "I suppose not."

Hannibal nodded and was lost in thought again for a moment.

"It's troubling you." Mischa observed.

"The patient isn't in ER anymore, he's out of my hands." Hannibal said to himself as much as to his sister. His tone was the coldness he usually reserved for others, not her. But at that moment he felt the need to pull it around him to shield her, and himself.

Mischa's smile was lopsided, "I can't imagine that would stop you. Tell me what happened?"

Hannibal shook his head, "There's nothing to tell. And you know I'm not allowed to discuss patients."

"I'm not asking about the patient, I'm asking about you. Hannibal you've been punched in the face." She pointed out.

Hannibal let out a low grumble. Before he finally spoke again, trying not to shut her out as his first instinct told him to.

"If I'm honest? I'm almost glad this happened. I think it was the wake up call the patient needed. If my being punched in the face means that he might not return to that situation, then it was a small price to pay." Hannibal replied, looking out over the garden as he did so. Not sure he could meet the intense gaze he knew she was giving him.

After a moment she set down her fork and said, "Understandable, but Hannibal… please don't forget, I'd be lost without you. I'd very much prefer you don't put yourself in danger."

He smiled fondly at her, "This was a very unique circumstance," Hannibal replied, taking her hand across the table.

*

[Never Never – Korn]

I'll never love again
I would ever have to pretend
I would never love again, damn!
I don't even wanna have to try
Draw a line
Never flies
I don't even wanna have to die

Will let out a shuddering breath and turned the music up louder than he really should. He had his headphones on, that Jack had brought in. And Will only had so many songs downloaded to his phone, but he was wishing now that he had skipped this one.

And yet, there was also something cathartic about it. Something that made him turn it up. He wanted to feel the pain the words brought to the surface. In some ways he needed to, as difficult as that was.

I'll never gonna love again
Never gonna have to try to pretend
Never, never, never

Will lay back against his pillows Every now and then he unconsciously went to clench his jaw, only to be stopped by the shock of pain at the attempt.

He let out a little grunt and closed his eyes.

So I run and hide
And I never wanna sleep the fight
So I classify
All my hate inside
I'll never love again

"Sounds interesting," Doctor Lecter commented, gesturing to Will's headphones as he came into the room, startling Will, who realised he must have had the music up too loud to hear the knock.

Will stopped the music and took the headphones off and gave the doctor an apologetic look.

"Sorry, Jack brought them in for me, I was feeling…" Will muttered, in the way he was become used to.

Lecter shook his head dismissively, "No need to apologise, Will.” His smile was soft and he paused for a moment before continuing, gently. “I thought I'd just come and let you know that I've spoken with the police."

Will went rigid, his breath getting short as he nodded. He'd already been told that Lecter was going to press charges, and of course he didn't blame him. Even if there was a part of him that would rather he didn't, just to let everything lie. Just as he always had done with Matt. Not that it got him very far.

"He's been arrested and charged. I suspect that he will be released on bond, but I think it would be prudent for you to get a restraining order in place." Lecter continued, the words making Will's blood run cold. "From what I can gather, this has resulted in Mr Brown being let go from his job. They can't have felons in-"

"Yeah, okay." Will said to cut him off, not able to hear more.

Lecter gave a little nod, his expression one of understanding.

"I can have the police come and speak with you before you're discharged if you’d like? They will be able to begin processing the restraining order." Lecter continued sofly.

Will wanted to just ask the man to leave, he didn't want to have to deal with any of this. But he restrained himself, knowing that this was in his best interest and that was all the doctor cared about too.

"Sure," Will nodded, and tried not to sound as choked with emotion as he was.

"Okay, I’ll do that." Lecter replied with a gentle smile and started towards the door, "I wish you all the best Will." He said, and then was gone.

Will blinked and then put his headphones back on.

*

"Here I'll take that," Jack stepped between Will and the bed to grab his bag from where it sat on the bed.

"Thanks, Jack." Will's meagre and painful smile was still tinged with heartache, and he was in too much pain to refuse the offer of help.

"Will, don't you worry about anything," Phyllis said, coming to his side and stroking a hand softly through his hair, pretty much the only part of him that didn't seem to hurt, especially now they were easing him off of the really strong meds. "You're going to stay with us as long as you like, okay? You can have Randall's room for now but we can always-"

"I really appreciate it, I won't, um. I won't stay too long. I don't want to be in the way." Will swallowed.

Jack turned, bag now in hand, and frowned at him. "That's actually something we wanted to talk to you about."

Will's stomach dropped and he could already feel the prickle of tears in the corners of his eyes.

"No, nothing bad," Phyllis said, shooting Jack a look.

"No, I didn't mean...anyways, you know Barney and I have been talking for awhile about setting up a new garage on the other side of the city. Well we think we found the perfect place, and it has a small apartment above it. We were thinking, if you want, you can come heal up at ours whilst we sort it out and then you can transfer there. Barney is going to head it up and it would be good if we didn't have to take on an entirely new team there from scratch. Figured you could have the apartment as part of the job."

Will felt a flutter in his stomach at the thought, completely unsure of how he should respond to such an offer. But even so, "Jack, that's… I can't do that. You don't have to-"

Jack chuckled, "I know I don't have to. And don't think this is all about you. Barney and I have been trying to work this out for a while, so you'd be doing us a favour. I mean, as long as you're happy to live and work on the other side of the city."

It was all Will could do not to throw his arms around Jack and squeeze him, resorting instead to nodding silently. The thought of being able to start over and escape from Matt whilst not losing the few good people in his life, made his chest hurt.

When he'd left his dad's he didn't really have anyone, anything, to leave behind. And now he did and that though of having to potentially lose that in order to stay safe, filled Will with a sense of hopelessness.

"Thank you, Jack," Will finally managed, choking a little on the words.

"Let's get you home," Phyllis said, reaching down and taking his hand, giving it a light squeeze. Will squeezed hers back.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Will learns to dance.

Chapter Notes

NB: I have no idea how the social care system works in the US, so again, if incorrect please suspend your belief.

Two Years Later

Will stretched and breathed deep, remembering for a moment how painful this move used to be for him. He'd come such a long way, mentally and physically.

He'd started taking yoga classes after he'd been released from hospital and healed up. His social worker had suggested it initially, as a gentle way to bring mind and body back to health. And Will's new therapist, Alana Bloom, agreed.

So was he'd healed enough, he'd tried it out. And whilst part of him felt like he was having to make time for it, he did still feel energised and good afterwards. Especially as the moves got easier as he healed all the more, and became more flexible with practice.

Will did enjoy it, and it definitely had helped, but it was sort of boring. He wasn't really someone made to relax in that way. And now that he sort of felt he didn't need it anymore, he wasn't sure why he was still doing it.

The only thing that really kept him engaged with it, is the difference it made to his dancing. He liked to put on some music and dance around his apartment, or sometimes at the garage if Barney had stepped out. He was more supple, more flexible. Able to do moves that he'd never considered before. He felt like he'd moved beyond just dancing for himself. He was getting pretty competent at memorising and performing whole dance routines from music videos, even if in the privacy of his own apartment.

The massive negative side was that Will couldn't help associate yoga with his recovery. Which limited the chances of him ever fully enjoying it.

More and more he was thinking about quitting it, because the stronger and healthier he became, the more it felt like it was tying him to the past.

Will knew he should chat with Dr Bloom about it, but so far had been putting it off. Not only because it had been partly her suggestion, but also because he had nothing to replace it with. And he figured if he spent his downtime doing nothing, at most reading or fishing, he wouldn't keep up with the same agility and physical drive.

The thought of joining a gym was not appealing. And whilst swimming might be fun, it was never going to compare to the sort of avoiding the frogspawn kinda dips he'd enjoyed in his childhood.

When the class ended, Will showered and started out of the building, his hair still a little damp and wetting the shoulders of his t-shirt. He'd started growing it out a little longer, finding that he enjoyed the way the curls tousled all the more the longer they got. It probably made him look a little younger than he was, but he figured he should capitalise on that before, god forbid, he started losing his hair like his dad had.

As Will got to the bulletin board by the front desk of the community centre, colourful fliers caught his eye. He paused, thinking that maybe they would hold a solution if he really was going to quit yoga. Certainly he'd feel better telling Dr Bloom he was quitting if he had some other viable activities lined up and ready. Maybe some gentle sports?

He looked over the fliers. Different types of yoga, Tai Chi and some more combative martial arts. There was one for aerial yoga which made Will pause for a moment. The idea of being free and weightless was appealing, but it meant more yoga.

The small schedule at the end of the board caught his eye. It was a flier on one side, it seemed, but the side facing out was a class schedule for a local dance school.

Will's breath stopped for a moment.

He had never actually considered dance. It had always been something he did privately, not something to learn or to improve. It was just dancing around the kitchen, just like he had with his mom all those years ago.

But even as Will told himself that, his mind raced ahead at the sort of things they might teach in a class. A year or more ago, he'd have never considered it. But at least being in yoga, surrounded by the small group of regulars he'd come to know well enough to say hi to, it didn't seem so daunting.

Will took his phone out of his pocket and snapped a photo of the flier to read again later.

*

"Morning, kiddo!" Barney smiled and gave Will a little wave as Will crossed the forecourt of the garage.

"Hey." Will replied with a wide smile. He'd pretty much been up with the sun, feeling the need to burn some energy and ending up going for a jog before needing to start work. He jogged up the outside steps to his little apartment. He'd have a quick shower and then pull on his coveralls and join Barney for work.

Barney had already noted that he'd been jogging increasingly often. Or even just dancing around at the auto shop. A few times he'd been swimming, though the local pool wasn't particularly nice.

Will had forgotten how much he'd enjoyed being active as a kid. He'd sort of figured it was an escape from his dad, a much more overpowering memory than his enjoyment of the activities he'd done after school. Mostly running and swimming, things that didn't involve him having to play a team sport.

Getting back into that had given Will a whole new lease of life. And the more he was active, the more active he wanted to be. It made him all the more eager to have something to do if he stopped doing yoga. And increasingly, thinking of himself, not what it would please others for him to do.

He'd spent a week looking over the photo he snapped of the dance studio flier, and kept considering going along to check it out. The more he thought about it, the more it brought back happy memories of his mom that made him smile.

In the end he decided he would mention it in his next therapy session. Will had to admit to still being a little cagey with her, but talking with Alana Bloom had made things easier. And she'd been encouraging of him, trying to push him from his comfort zone a little in order to boost his confidence.

And it had worked somewhat.

With her encouragement, Will had started making lures again. This time going as far as to mount and frame them with driftwood he collected when fishing on the occasional weekend. He had sold a few to customers at the garage, before following Dr Bloom's advice and selling online. Now he had people emailing him to order custom made ones.

Will smiled as he thought about the encouragement that Dr Bloom was bound to give him over the dance classes, too. He hardly need even mention it to her if just to get her opinion, but knew he would, because he still needed that little push.

"Penny for 'em." Barney asked, an hour after Will had joined him and had started to daydream instead of finishing the service.

Will just smiled and shook his head, which Barney accepted, as always, never one to push.

"In that case, you better get your ass over to that beat up old mustang and get the paperwork sorted. Owner is coming by to collect it later today, thank the lord." Barney raised his eyes heavenwards for a moment then shook his head. "Got some fella bringing a Bentley in for servicing tomorrow, I don't want him seeing that pile'a crap and judging us on it."

Will nodded and chuckled, fairly sure that someone who owned a Bentley was likely to judge them either way.

Will was still smiling as he did as he'd been asked. He started getting the car ready for collection and then, for good measure, driving it off the lot and onto the street so that the

owner could just drive off with minimal fuss. Anything to help Barney out.

For lunch, Will joined Barney, sitting on some deckchairs out back in the warm breeze, eating their respective sandwiches.

“Say, Barney.” Will started, swallowing down a bite. “Since my hairs grown out all long and messy, and I’m always pretty much ingrained with oil and dirt, would it be best if I’m not around tomorrow when the Bentley comes in? Wouldn’t want the place to look shabby.” Will tried to hide his grin, but had to let out a small chuckle when Barney turned to face him full on and gave him an incredulous look.

“You are starting to look like a damn hippy,” Barney chuckled, before his expression became curious. “Okay kid, you got somewhere else to be? That it?” Barney tried to sound gruff, though it didn’t stop him sounding like the big softy he was.

Will cleared his throat and went serious for a minute. “I actually, there was something I wanted to check out but I might need an extended lunch break. That okay?”

Barney waved his hand dismissively. “Sure, sure. Leave me to deal with the stuck up ones!”

Will chuckled again and shook his head, “Thanks Barney.”

*

Having studied the flier more than was really necessary, Will had decided to take up the offer it gave at the bottom - to drop by anytime to observe a class and find out more.

There was a lunchtime class that he figured he could just take a look at before deciding whether to sign up. Then he could always take one of the evening classes or see if Jack and Barney would be okay with him working around it in one of his lunch breaks.

As Will walked to the little studio above a dance equipment and clothing store, he was excited.

He had expected to be nervous, and this really showed him how much his confidence had in fact improved. He kept remembering the fun times dancing with his mom and how this felt like it might be a connection to her in some way. Or at least that was how he was looking at it.

And he’d enjoyed letting his creativity flow again with making the lures, and this felt like an extension of that. He could already imagine Dr Bloom’s smiling face as he told her all about this. She’d be proud of how far he’d come, how much his own person he was now.

He was proud of himself.

The nerves finally struck when he got to the shop front and had to ask about the classes. The sweet old lady behind the counter smiled at him and directed him up the stairs at the back of the shop. Now was the time that he would have run away.

Actually, that wasn’t true. A year or more ago he wouldn’t have gotten this far.

And so although the were butterflies doing all kinds of things in his belly, he was also grinning. His teeth chattering with nerves and his jaw aching with the force of the genuine smile which only grew as he ascended towards the music.

It was a disco number and when he stepped up into the little landing and looked in on the small studio in front of him, he could see a room of ten people dancing on roller skates.

[Brick House – Commodores]

The clothes she wears, her sexy ways
Make an old man wish for younger days, yeah, yeah

His heart beat in his chest, and he had the simultaneous thoughts of 'I want to do that', and 'I'll never be able to do that.'

She knows she's built and knows how to please
Sure enough to knock a strong man to his knees

Will's eyes were wide as he took in the controlled moves, the way they avoided each other when they rolled, and how most of the dancing was done with their arms. It was mesmerising.

She's a brick house
Yeah, she's the one, the only one, built like an amazon, yeah
Shake it down, shake it down, shake it down now

When the music stopped, the dancers were laughing and chattering, all trying to catch their breath.

"Can I help you?" Will hadn't noticed the older man who had appeared next to him in the hallway. He had silver blonde hair and an openly happy face that immediately set Will at ease.

"Oh, um, yeah. I was thinking about taking classes?" Will said, secretly elated that he'd managed to get the words out and not make a fool of himself.

"Oh!" Jimmy clapped his hands together and looked dramatically thrilled. "We always need more boys around here! I'm Jimmy, Jimmy Price. You'll have met mother downstairs. This is my place, since she retired anyway." He gave a half roll of his eyes as though his mother still being in the shop was not quite retired enough for his liking, and Will grinned.

He really liked this guy already. And, not that he wanted to make any assumptions about a camp man who ran a dance studio, but he'd never really had much in the way of gay friends in his life.

"What sort of classes do you want to take?" Jimmy asked, eager and bright as he led Will down the hall to a little alcove at the end with a couple of sofas that had seen better days, set around a low coffee table with many ring stains. "We do tap, jazz, modern, hip-hop, burlesque, boylesque, pole, ballet. I mean, pretty much everything except ballroom, really. If

you take pole to the advanced level then you can also sign up for aerial at the circus school we partner with."

"Aerial?" Will asked, not entirely sure what the man meant, but already interested. He could imagine flying or being suspended weightless, like there were no cares in the world. Like the yoga he'd scene.

"Oh honey, you need to see this." Jimmy reached under the coffee table and pulled out a pile of thick binders. He looked through them for a moment then handed one to Will, "Here."

Will took it, unprepared for the weight and almost dropped it, managing to catch it in his lap. The front was a photo of a pole dancer, she was nothing like Will would have pictured. Will had always assumed pole dancers just ground against a pole as they stripped, but this woman was an athlete. Will couldn't even tell how she was holding onto the pole, and yes, she did look like she was flying as she stretched out long, the pole somehow gripped between her legs. Will's heart beat fast.

He opened the binder and started to leaf through. It was page upon page of the most incredible strong and toned men and women. Several were holding themselves at a perpendicular angle to the poles, and Will had no idea how strong they must be to do that.

Jimmy obviously saw the awe in his face when he chuckled, "Yeah, pretty cool huh? You know all those guys and gals at the clubs, this is what they can do. You want someone to crush walnuts between their thighs for you? These are the people."

Will flicked on and towards the back, found something that made his breath stop.

On one page was a woman posed in an amazing contortion within a hoop suspended above the ground. On the other a man doing the splits, suspended by sashes of material threaded around his arms and legs.

"Silks," Jimmy supplied as he saw Will's attention focused on the man. "Aerial silks. You'll see them in Chinese circuses and such. Like I said, you'd need to get pretty advanced, build up the right muscles and tone so you don't fall and crack your skull. But it's an option." Jimmy said casually.

"I want to do this," Will replied without hesitation. "Can I learn to do this?" He looked up at Jimmy, knowing his expression was imploring.

Jimmy smiled softly, "Baby, you can do anything you set your mind to."

*

When Will returned to the garage, he was elated.

He'd been slightly longer than planned, but knew as soon as he saw Barney's face light up with how happy he was, that it wouldn't be a problem.

"I'm sorry Barney, I'll stay late to make up the time." Will said, unable to stop himself smiling.

Barney grabbed a rag and started to wipe his hands as he started towards Will and away from the car he'd been working on.

"Forget about that, son. Tell me what's going on with you? I don't think I've seen you this happy." Barney's smile only faltered slightly, and Will was sure he was wondering if he'd phrased things okay. It had been a long time since Barney or Jack had been on eggshells around him, so Will skirted over it with a dismissive shake of his head.

"I went to check out a dance studio. And… Well it was pretty amazing. I just need to work out my schedule and I'm going to take some classes." Will said excitedly.

"That's great, Will!" Barney beamed and looked genuinely pleased with the news. "Sounds like a fine thing for you to do. I've no doubt you'll be a natural."

Will felt his cheeks heat, a combination of the sweet paternal flattery, and aching from the smiling.

"I'll work something out," Will said, deflecting now, with too much attention on him. Which Barney totally understood and chuckled at before walking away.

Will put down his bag and looked out over the lot.

"Woah! Who drives a car like that?" Will took in the Bentley that had arrived as expected.

"Oh kid, don't get me started. Nice guy, but… Acted like royalty." Barney chuckled. "Had himself one of those Eurotrash accents, so maybe he's a Lord or a Count of something. Or a vampire."

Will joined Barney's laugh as he walked over to the car, sleek and black, and not something they saw often.

As if to answer his unspoken question, Barney said, "We were recommended to him, which is nice. And he was polite enough, just… snooty, y'know?"

Will nodded and chuckled, imagining Barney not taking any airs and graces for one moment. Jack would have been even worse.

"And I haven't even told you the best bit," Barney shook with silent laughter, "You should have seen his suit, kiddo. He looked like some sort of fancy upholstery from a manor house or something. Like one of those costume dramas that Phyllis hates."

Will laughed at that too, the only one he knew she had given the time of day to was *Belle*, and she still had plenty to say about that.

"Well, I guess I better get started on it," Will grinned.

"Just don't you scratch the paint work!" Barney warned, still laughing to himself as he went back to the car he was working on.

Will was still chuckling too as he looked over the car again, hoping that he wasn't around when the owner came to pick it up. He'd probably not be able to keep a straight face.

*

"Damn, Will. I knew you'd be a natural at this!" Jimmy marvelled as Will moved into a *music box* pose.

Will was straining, muscles aching as he held in place. This move was new, but Jimmy was right, he was getting the hang of it all pretty quick. It helped that he went to class a couple of times a week, stuck to his workout regimen and even installed a pole in his little apartment.

Jack had gifted him that, seeing how well he was doing at it, how happy it made him.

All in all, over the last few months, Will had practically made a second home at the dance studio, and he liked to count Jimmy Price as a friend. One that would be brutally honest and not walk on eggshells around him.

"I can see you're struggling to hold it, but really Will, that's quite impressive for only just having picked up that move." Jimmy continued and then sat at one of the chairs at the edge of the studio. "Carry on," he flourished his hand, as though daring Will to ask him to leave.

It was after hours, classes were over but Will always ducked in to get in some practice in front of the mirrors before Jimmy came and locked it all up. Dancing at home was great, but for new moves especially, he needed the wall of mirrors to see that he really was getting it right.

Jimmy cleared his throat, giving Will an expectant look, before turning up the music a little. He'd had the same song on repeat for twenty minutes, finding the gentle rhythm of it was perfect for the routine he was putting together.

More a series of poses than routine really, Will corrected himself. Routine implied that someone would be watching him.

Will maneuvered elegantly down to the ground before taking hold of the pole again as the song restarted, going into his first movement.

[Closer – The Chainsmokers]

Hey, I was doing just fine before I met you
I drink too much and that's an issue but I'm okay
Hey, you tell your friends it was nice to meet them
But I hope I never see them again
I know it breaks your heart
Moved to the city in a broke down car
And four years, no calls
Now you're looking pretty in a hotel bar

“Nice!” Jimmy commented as Will went through some well practiced moves before pulling himself further up the pole.

He thought having the audience would put him off but Will found himself smiling at Jimmy’s little whoops as he worked the pole. In class, they were all too busy concentrating on themselves to really watch each other, and at home he was always alone. This was new and actually sort of thrilling.

So baby pull me closer in the backseat of your Rover
That I know you can't afford
Bite that tattoo on your shoulder
Pull the sheets right off the corner
Of the mattress that you stole
From your roommate back in Boulder

Jimmy let out a little cheer followed by a genuine gasp as Will switched hands as he moved. He knew he had it, even if it might have looked like he was going to fall, he knew he could make the move. Will’s heart pounded at the idea of choreographing a routine that would have people gasping at the unexpected or a faked near miss.

It was exhilarating.

We ain't ever getting older
We ain't ever getting older
We ain't ever getting older

Jimmy stood and clapped as Will ended back in the *music box* position Jimmy had walked in on, a low whistle escaping his lips.

“Damn Will! I’m just… Did you say you were a mechanic? Because I think you have a future in this. Never underestimate how much you can make with dollars in the waistband.” Jimmy gave his own ass a little shake. He grabbed Will’s towel from one of the other chairs and walked over with it as Will got down from the pole. He took it and wiped the sweat from his face and hair.

He let out a little chuckle but shook his head, “I’m perfectly happy as a grease monkey,” Will dismissed.

Jimmy pursed his lips and cocked his brow, “I bet you’re very popular in a pair of dirty coveralls. You could perform like that you know? If it’s the attire you’d miss? I’m sure sexy pole dancing grease monkey would be a huge money maker.”

“No thanks, Jimmy.” Initially flattered, the subject made Will slightly uncomfortable. And perhaps Jimmy realised that, because he cocked his head and looked at him.

“You think you’re not good enough.” It wasn’t a question.

Will shook his head and sighed, “It’s not just that… Look at me. I’m just a scrawny kid with bruises from poorly executed moves and…” He nervously and sharply pointed at the long

scar just above his right knee.

Jimmy made a show of squinting to see it, then looked Will up and down.

“Scrawny? Will, you’re clearly looking in broken mirrors. You’ve filled out, you’re hot. Every dancer has bruises, it’s par of the course. And as for that itty bitty scar? You’re worrying over nothing. You an absolute stunner. If I were five years younger...”

Will rolled his eyes with a chuckle and began back towards the chairs, collecting his bottle of water and chugging some down.

“Okay, well if I can’t pimp you into show business, get out, I want to lock up and go to bed. I’m old and need my beauty sleep.”

Will chuckled and nodded, moving towards the exit. He’d grab his bag from the lockers in the hall and then head home for a shower. It was already kind enough that Jimmy let him stay like this as it was.

Jimmy had just locked the studio door and started with him down the hallway when Will cleared his throat. Jimmy watching and cheering had brought to mind something he’d fleetingly considered weeks ago.

“I was thinking Jimmy, about taking the boylesque classes.” Will said, tentatively.

“Are you nuts!” Jimmy near shouted at him.

Will winced, “You think it’s a terrible idea?”

“I think it’s terrible that you’re only just considering this! You should absolutely take the class.” Jimmy admonished him like he was a fool for not having considered it before.

“Okay, well, I guess I’ll put my name down on the-” Will started, knowing loads of the classes had wait lists, he’d actually been super lucky with the pole classes.

“Pssh,” Jimmy waved his hand, “Darling, stars don’t go on a waiting list. Just turn up, I’ll square it all for you.”

“Jimmy, you can’t… I mean, I’m not a star or-”

“Will, stop interrupting me!” Jimmy sassed him. “I own this place, I say what goes. And you Will Graham, whether you know it or not, are a shiny, twinkly, slightly sweaty star.”

*

“Will,” Alana Bloom smiled warmly at him as he entered the room and took his usual seat on the opposing little sofas. She settled back into her chair, notebook beside her and gave him her full attention.

That was something he kind of hated, her just waiting for him to start. Mostly because knowing what to talk about got harder as time went on because he had already worked

through so much. They had started with weekly appointments in the beginning and now he saw her once a month and often felt like he didn't have much more to say than - everything is going the same.

Will cleared his throat.

"I, um… I've been getting on great with dance class," Will said.

"That's wonderful," She looked genuinely delighted and Will found himself encouraged, as always when he was around Dr Bloom.

"Yeah, Jimmy, the guy I told you owns the studio, got me into the boylesque classes too and so I've been doing that about the last month." Will beamed, thrilled at how it had all been going.

"Sounds like you're keeping pretty busy," She smiled and Will nodded.

"Yeah, two nights a week at pole, one night at boylesque. Plus Jimmy lets me stay late to use the space to practice." Will chuckled to himself, "He says I could be star." His laugh turned self deprecating as he thought of the fact that Jimmy said it almost every time he saw him now.

How's our star doing today?

Dr Bloom cocked her head and gave him a thoughtful look. "Is that so hard to believe, Will? From what you've told me, you seem to have a natural talent for it. You clearly enjoy dancing immensely and must be as good as I am certain you are." She gave a little smile as his cheeks heated at the compliments. "If a professional thinks you could be a star, why would you doubt that?"

Will shrugged, remaining silent for long enough that she continued.

"No one is saying you have to do more than you're doing Will, and certainly nothing you don't want to. You can still be a star, still have that quality and ability without having to do any more than you are doing now."

Will nodded, understanding what she was saying.

They moved on to talk about work. And the night Jimmy had insisted he come for drinks with some of the other people at the studio. The nice girl Abigail he'd met who was a regular there too.

That had been nice. He didn't really have people outside of work, and he liked Jimmy a lot. He wondered how different his childhood might have been with a role model like him in his life. Dr Bloom encouraged him not to dwell on it, but to enjoy the new friendship he'd formed now. And perhaps now was exactly the time he needed a friend who could understand part of him that, as great as they were, Barney and the Crawfords perhaps couldn't.

All in all the session was good. They usually were these days. Will didn't go home feeling like he'd gone through an emotional wringer as Dr Bloom helped him come to terms with

everything that had happened. And how hard it had been to move on from Matt despite everything - because sometimes the good memories masked all the terrible things.

As he was about to leave Dr Bloom stopped him with her hand on his shoulder.

“Will, what your friend said about being a star. As I said, don’t feel pressured by it. But… don’t dismiss it either. Think about how far you have come in the last two years. You would never have thought back then, that you’d be taking dance classes. Just, think about it.”

She gave him a bright smile and encouraging squeeze of his shoulder as she let him leave.

Will could think of nothing else the whole way home. She was right, and maybe Jimmy was too?

*

Will dried off from his shower and pulled on his boxers, towelling his hair as he went through the open plan living space of his little apartment.

It was a nice day out and they had closed shop slightly early. They had no cars booked in for services until the next morning, and nothing hanging around for repair. It was Jack’s birthday so he and Barney would be joining the Crawfords for dinner.

Will checked the clock on the wall and realised he had at least a half hour before he needed to start getting ready.

He dried off and picked up his pole gear from the sideboard, flicking the music volume up as he walked by. First taking the cloth and buffing the whole thing from top to bottom until it was so shiny he could see his face in it. Then he talced his hands and between his thighs, anywhere else that seemed appropriate, before pulling himself up onto the pole.

Since starting boylesque a few months earlier, he’d started to incorporate some of those moves into his pole work. Altogether he’d ended up with a rather pleasing routine that, he imagined, if he were to ever perform it - would require a costume that included nipple tassels.

Will chuckled at the thought and hummed the tune as he moved, perfectly at peace.

The peace was shattered by a rather loud, “Holy fuck. Shit…”

Will looked around so quickly he nearly pulled a muscle. There was a man at his open apartment door. He’d left the door open and only the flyscreen across because of the heat. He never ever had visitors other than Barney or Jack and so seeing a complete stranger there at the top of his steps caught him off guard.

Will swung himself down from the pole, not even registering at that moment that he was still only in his underwear as the man gawped at him.

“What do you want?” Will snapped the words, glad of the flyscreen door between them, but nonetheless shaken by the unexpected visitor.

“Woah, shit sorry buddy. I thought this was the office.” The man raised his hands in a placating manner and took a step back from the door.

“This is my apartment, the office is downstairs. We’re closed. Didn’t you see the closed sign?” Will knew his voice was coming out more emotional than he wished, but he couldn’t do much about it.

“I’m sorry, really. Shit! Look I didn’t mean to intrude, or scare you…” The words confirmed that Will was coming over as panicked as he felt, whether he liked it or not. “Look, my name’s Brian. Brian Zeller. I live a block over and my car wouldn’t start, and now it has and it’s making some weird as shit noises. I need it for work, so I thought I’d come over and… I didn’t realise you’d be closed.”

Will calmed a little as the man spoke. “I’ll… I’ll come down. Can you wait, downstairs? Wait there?”

“Sure, of course!” Zeller replied, hands still up as he stepped back again, then turned and went back down the stairs.

Will let out a shuddering breath, taking a minute to compose himself before he pulled a t-shirt and a pair of shorts on and headed down to the garage.

Zeller was waiting at the bottom of the steps, as promised.

“Sorry, I… wasn’t expecting company,” Will started to explain, not planning to go into the details that his ex had made him a bit of a nervous wreck and Zeller had received what was actually a fairly good response. Resisting the urge to just slam the door in his face had been difficult.

“No, it’s good. My bad. I’m sorry I startled you.” Zeller gave a lopsided smile and looked a little awkward about the whole thing.

Will shook his head dismissively and pulled on a smile that he didn’t quite feel. He unlocked the office door and came back out with the work book, flicking to the right page.

“Um, we’re booked out tomorrow morning. But one of those is just an oil change, so we could get you in after lunch tomorrow, if that works for you?” Will asked, biting at his lower lip.

“Sure, that would be great. I can work from home tomorrow and drive it over at lunchtime. Or push it over at this rate.”

“Yeah,” Will nodded, not really taking in the man’s words as he took the pencil that was clipped in the book and wrote Zeller into the afternoon slot.

“I appreciate it! Seriously!” Zeller said, his smile warm.

Will felt a little more relaxed now that they had talked and he had calmed down. He was sure there was nothing to fear from Brian Zeller, and besides, Barney would be there with him the next day.

Zeller held out his hand they gave a firm handshake before turning to walk away. He was almost off the lot when he turned and frowned curiously at Will.

“Do you, uh, work at Bar Katz?” The man asked.

Will returned the frown and shook his head, “I don’t know what that is.”

“It’s a club. They do dinner and show kinda things. Go-go dancers, pole dancers, burlesque, cabaret, that sort of thing. It’s in this part of town, that’s why I… I guess I saw you on the pole and put two and two together.” Zeller shrugged with a smile. “You looked pretty good, I mean…” The man blushed and made a face at himself, which Will had to admit was amusing.

“I just meant,” He continued, “That they are high quality acts there. You could totally work there.”

“Oh,” was Will’s only reply.

Zeller gave a curt nod and walked away as will blushed.

A few days later the man returned to pick up his car and left the fliers on Will’s steps.

Bar Katz.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Will takes his dancing to a new, more public level...

One Year Later

Will flexed, arching his back and letting the silks take his weight.

He sighed into the movement, second nature to him now. He belonged in the silks, Jimmy often joked he was a spider, waiting to lure innocent passersby. Will had laughed at that and said the only lures he used were for fishing.

But he wasn't unaware of what Jimmy was saying. As he moved gracefully into another pose, he caught sight of himself in the circus studio's mirrors. He wasn't the boy he had been a year before. He was toned, his slight frame was athletic now where it had been scrawny. Not overly muscular, but deceptively strong given how twinkish he still looked, also according to Jimmy.

Every now and then he did wonder about performing in someway. The people that ran the circus school he was training at, had mentioned it a few times, venue asked if he wanted to go on one of their tours. But Will liked his job with Barney and wasn't going to drop that to go on a short tour in the hopes of seeing if more work came of it. Despite the fact that Barney and the Crawfords had all told him to do so. Ever encouraging.

You're only young once! Phyllis had said more than once, gazing softly at her husband.

He let himself hang there for a moment, feeling the calmness he always did with that strain on his muscles, testing the strength of his body. So strong now.

Will held himself there a long while, studying the pose in the mirrored walls before finally starting to unravel himself gracefully back to the ground.

"Will, you coming?" Abigail called into him as she passed the studio door, clearly on her way to the changing rooms after her own class.

Will shook his head, "Not tonight, Jack is having a new kitchen fitted at my apartment. The old one was old forty years ago. I need to go home and pack a few things out of the way for the fitters."

Abigail smiled and nodded, "Oh, okay. Well next time for sure."

"For sure," He echoed with a smile of his own. He liked Abigail, like him she used both the dance studio and the circus school. She was a little younger than him and already worked as a contortionist. She was one of a number of lovely people he had made friends with since he'd taken up dance and aerial work. They often went out for dinner every couple of weeks, a whole bunch of them and sometimes Jimmy too.

Will grabbed his towel and returned her little wave as she headed out. He mopped his brow and around his neck, desperately wanting a shower but deciding to wait until he got home. He'd only get sweaty again moving the boxes he'd already packed. Plus, Jack had told him not to worry, but he was going to start moving the white goods as much as possible so that it was easier all around in the morning.

Will savoured the cool night air as he stepped outside, his skin still hot and sweaty from practice. The walk home was just what he needed to stretch out and cool down. He felt prepared to tackle the boxes once he got up into the apartment. Until he saw them at least.

He took a deep breath, dropping his dance bag by the door and surveying the scene. Perhaps it was a little worse than he remembered leaving it. At least one more box of things to pack, minus the cereal and coffee he'd have in the morning before the fitters arrived.

Will pulled off his t-shirt to put in the laundry, it didn't need to get any stinkier than it already was.

He sighed and started into the kitchen.

It took an hour to get everything cleared up before he could start moving the fridge and cooker, or at least as far as he could manage. Hopefully far enough to be helpful.

He was about to call it a night and head to the shower when something caught his eye. A few bits of paper that had fallen down the side of the fridge so he grabbed them up and dropped on his ass, too achey to stand to go through them.

One was a postcard from Jack and Phyllis from a holiday they took, that he'd wondered about after it had gone missing. There were a couple of clipped recipes from magazines, some junk mail and-

Will held the flier and blinked.

He hadn't thought about that day in a while. In fact, he hadn't really thought about it at all, let alone realise the flier was missing. He just figured he'd thrown it out at the time.

But there it was, a bit gross and aged from having been stuck down the side of the refrigerator for what had to be at least a year he was sure.

Will turned it over in his hands and let out a chuckle. So much had changed since then, his ability and skills most of all. He wondered if the flier had been given to him recently and not before he had taken up silks, whether it might have sparked an interest.

He chewed on his lower lip a little, thinking about it.

Maybe he should check the place out. Even if just to see what sort of things they did there, be entertained. It could be interesting to see other dancers actually performing things that he could learn from outside of the classroom.

Will stood and dropped the pile of paperwork onto the table and grabbed his phone.

~Hey Abi, what are you doing Friday night? There's a cabaret club I thought we could check out and watch the performances?

The reply was almost instant and made Will smile.

~Absofreakinglutely!

*

Hannibal took a deep breath. And then another. He swallowed back the bile and clasped his hands quickly together to try and hide the shaking as he heard the door to the staff lounge start to open. He sat in one of the low chairs facing away from the door but knew immediately from the sigh, who had entered.

"There you are," There was concern in Sutcliffe's voice. "Hannibal, it's okay." He continued softly as he rounded to look at Hannibal.

Hannibal nodded, trying to agree. Wishing he *could* agree but not really feeling it deep down.

"This isn't the first patient you've lost," Sutcliffe said gently, placing a hand on Hannibal's shoulder. "These things happen. It's the Emergency Room. Sometimes-"

Hannibal turned a glare on the man, not wanting to hear the lecture that they all gave to residents. Objectively he of course already knew all this. All the same, he shook his head.

"I think I want it to be the last." Hannibal said quietly. Moving into ER surgery had seemed like a new challenge, and it was. Thrilling to some extent. But now instead of seeing the patients as they came in, he had to try and fix them. Often against the clock. And as with any competent surgeon, it was hard not to feel somewhat godlike. It was true that sometimes there were those they were just unable to save, and he knew that was the case here. But he hadn't wanted so desperately to save the young woman, her body broken after being pushed through a window by the abusive ex that had tracked her down. He saw Mischa's face in hers, a fear of failing her so totally ingrained in his psyche.

Sutcliffe nodded and Hannibal knew he really did understand that feeling, even if he didn't quite know why it was only cases like this that cracked Hannibal's cool reserve. "Everything will look better in the morning. You're off shift shortly, right?"

Hannibal looked up at Sutcliffe with a questioning look.

"There's a club I know-"

"No," Hannibal shook his head. "I can't… I just want to go home, shower and sleep. I have two days off. I wish to spend it alone."

Sutcliffe nodded his acceptance even as he said, “Okay, it’s your loss.”

“I’m fine with that.” Hannibal muttered the words, at least feeling a little lighter for the exchange.

He took a deep breath and pulled himself back together. He had another hour on shift and for once he hoped he wouldn't need to scrub in again and could leave on time.

It dragged. No new surgeries so he was again let to finish paperwork. And whilst he was glad to have no more life or death situations that evening, it turned out he could equally have done with some sort of distraction.

As it was he thought about the woman’s death for the rest of the shift, and then the whole of his drive home. It was on his mind as he showered and then finally fell into bed.

Hannibal slept badly, every part of him ached from having tossed and turned in his bed. His dreams replaying the evening before, but with the added feature of the antlered man he hadn’t thought of in some years. It stood there looming over his patient, taking her life before his very eyes and he was powerless to stop it.

He had tried so hard to save the young woman. Her injuries from the fall were too great, he knew that logically. But he had tried, even knowing that. And he knew that her death was not his fault. But it felt that way.

He had failed to save her, and the fact that she was beyond saving before she even got to him felt irrelevant. If only someone had intervened sooner, kept her safe as he had failed to do so for Mischa for far too long.

Hannibal Lecter did not like to feel as though he was not godlike. That he didn’t wield power over life after all. He didn't like to feel compromised in this way.

Although he had hoped to feel better in the morning, he was glad for having messaged his therapist the night before and arranged an emergency appointment for the afternoon. He rarely saw Dr Du Maurier these days.

She had helped him work through some of his childhood trauma, everything with Mischa, and the stresses of his working life. Now they had a standing appointment once a month unless something else came up. This was the first time he had called on her for such an appointment.

Having sweated through night clothes and sheets, Hannibal stripped the bed and had another shower. Luxuriating in it this time to try and ease his aches.

He tried to turn his thoughts from the girl, from the antlered monster, and to more practical concerns. He continued to do this as he finished his shower and went to the kitchen, taking the opportunity to start preparing a pleasing meal for himself and not the sort of food he often subsided on whilst working back to back shifts.

All the while his mind whirled and moved through different options.

By the time he left to attend his appointment, he was entirely sure that the therapy session ahead would mostly focus on his decision to move into a different field of practice. Perhaps psychology, where he could fix minds instead of bodies. Valuable work as he well knew.

If he ever did join Sutcliffe at that club for a drink, they would perhaps be toasting his leaving.

*

Will both smiled and rolled his eyes when Abigail appeared around the corner hanging off of Jimmy's arm. He knew they both had early classes the next day and so wondered if they would just split a cab later, already knowing they'd both be leaving early. In truth, he was sure he'd leave at the same time they did. He was just curious enough to check the place out, he didn't plan to stay on his own. He was still trying to tramp down thoughts of whether he should even go at all.

"You were invited?" He teased Jimmy as they drew close, deflecting some of his own nervousness over the evening ahead.

"Honey, I don't need an invitation to watch cute boys in little shorts." Jimmy quirked a brow at him.

"You can do that most of the day at your studio." Will chuckled.

Jimmy looked appalled, like he would clutch his pearls if he was wearing any, "I will have you know I am nothing but a consummate professional in the workplace."

Abi let out a snort and Will shook his head dismissively.

"Well, let's go oggle the cute boys in little shorts!" Abi urged, setting off along the street and expecting them to fall into pace behind her, which they did.

When they entered the club they were hit with the music from inside. It filled every inch of the place and Will found himself smiling at the great acoustics. He could imagine dancing in such a place, feeling the music around him and inside him.

As they continued on towards the bar, Will looked around and took it all in. He wasn't exactly sure what he'd expected, but it wasn't this. He was thinking something really seedy and crass, the sort of way strip clubs were often portrayed.

But this was more like the sort of thing he'd seen in old movies, a lounges with singers on stage and people sat drinking and eating at cabaret tables. It was a dinner and a show kind of place, and Will found himself smiling at that.

"Okay, I like this place," Jimmy announced, having been taking it all in as well. They moved to the bar and grabbed drinks pretty quickly, though the barman let them know there would be table service from eight. Despite a few tables being occupied, the place was pretty quiet.

They made their way down to the sunken seating area which was down a short flight of steps and overlooked by the bar. Will could see that you'd get a great view of the stage from the bar

if you wanted to just stay there, but he was excited to get seated and take in the whole experience.

“Yes, this is nice,” Jimmy said as he sat down, bouncing a little in the chair as though judging its comfort level.

Will smiled and Abi chuckled before she responded, "This is definitely a fun school trip."

Jimmy guffawed and they sipped their drinks as Will looked around. He wasn't one for the finer things in life, and whilst he could appreciate the ornate way in which the venue had been decorated, that wasn't the appeal for him. It was the atmosphere of the place, it spoke to a sort of freedom he yearned for.

It was almost 8pm and there were a couple of wait staff moving around the room, more customers arriving and the tables quickly filling up as Abi and Jimmy chattered to each other.

There were two men and a woman serving the area. She was dressed in a 50s style cocktail dress black with white polka dots, like she could be a waitress in 50s Vegas. One of the guys was in a smart black suit, though it was cut very tight and showed off his slight frame. And the other guy? Will's heart was thundering in his chest as he took in the sight of a man perhaps a little older than himself, wearing fishnet tights that went all the way up to his shiny black PVC hotpants. Above that instead of a shirt, he wore a white PVC corset that came up to just under his chest. His nipples were covered by white PVC discs and he wore a black PVC bowtie round his throat like a choker.

Will realised all three of them had been staring at the young man, completely mesmerised. Their gaze was only broken when Jimmy spoke again.

"I think this is my new favourite place." Jimmy breathed out the words and fanned himself, making both Will and Abi laugh.

Abi and Jimmy started talking again and Will looked back at the guy in PVC. He was attractive, for sure. But that wasn't what Will was focused on. He couldn't help but wonder what it would be like to dress in something like that. To feel like you could.

He'd spent most of his life in dirty overalls and plaid shirts. He enjoyed the comfort of such clothes and the lack of hassle at having to think about what to wear to work. And the truth was, he'd never allowed himself to entertain the thought of something more, and especially not anything like this guy was wearing.

He was sure if the thought had even entered his head when he was younger to dress like that, his dad would have known and the consequences would have been heavy.

Will shuddered and let out a breath, only turning away when the waiter made eye contact with him and gave him a lopsided smile.

"Like what you see, Will?" Jimmy winked at him and Will blushed, to which both Jimmy and Abi giggled like children.

They passed the time laughing and drinking, now being waited on by the girl in the polka dot dress, though Will's eyes were drawn so many times back to the guy in PVC he was sure he thought Will was trying to pick him up. The thought warmed his cheeks. He was cute, but Will definitely wasn't ready for that. He wasn't sure he even wanted to date again, ever.

Just before nine, a disembodied voice very theatrically announced that the show would be starting shortly and everyone should take their seats. The place was packed, the bar too and the energy in the place was amazing. There was a thrill to that that Will had never experienced before.

Go-go dancers suddenly appeared on the front of the stage, strutting out and dancing - two men and two women in little more than underwear, geeing up the audience for five minutes before the curtain went up. The audience was hyped, cheering and some in the reserved tables at the front even threw money on the stage, which Will hadn't been expecting.

He hadn't been expecting the rest either.

The curtains going up, a flamboyant drag queen as MC, who pretty much did a stand up act between dancers. And the dancers were phenomenal. Burlesque, boylesque, bearlesque, one woman with multiple hula hoops, a man who performed a striptease whilst on a bed of nails.

The final act before intermission was a pole dancer who performed on a sturdy looking portable pole that was wheeled on from the wings as the MC introduced her.

Will was mesmerised.

*

The excitement and alcohol had made a bathroom break a necessity, despite Jimmy teasing him that he would miss the go-go dancers who were now back on the stage, and on podiums he hadn't even noticed around the room, for the intermission.

Jimmy and Abi were going to have to leave before the next half, so Will said goodbye, telling them he'd get a cab too once he'd been to the bathroom. Abi had kissed his cheek but Jimmy had given him a knowing look and flicked his eyes to the waiter in PVC. Will shook his head and rolled his eyes.

Will came out of the bathroom and walked straight into a woman who was striding with purpose.

"Oh god, I'm so sorry," Will apologised as he tried to take a step back and then almost stood on someone behind him in terms busy hallway to the bathrooms.

The woman chuckled and took his elbow, steering him out of what was apparently a thoroughfare.

"Thanks," Will said, a blush rising on his cheeks at the situation.

"No problem kiddo," The woman said before looking him over. "You old enough to be in here?"

"I'm twenty seven," Will said, starting to fish for his wallet to prove it. But the woman put a hand over his to stop him.

"It's okay, I'll take your word for it. You look wholesome and trustworthy." She grinned at him. "You need me to help see you back to your table?"

"No," Will interjected quickly, "My friends had to leave, I was going to sit at the bar, maybe. I don't know. I should probably go but I wanted to watch the whole show. I've not seen anything like it before,"

"Oh kid, you're in for a treat. We save the best for last here," She grinned and pointed towards the bar. He gave her a nod of thanks and she started off back into the crowd as he wound his way to the bar.

He ordered a bourbon and found a good place to stand to continue to watch the show. The bar was crazy busy with all the people that hadn't got there early enough to get a table. And Will could see that the table the three of them had vacated was already full again.

The woman had been right. The second half was even better. More complicated acts, a few more on the pole. One with some sort of fans that moved like water, that Will had never seen before but instantly wanted to own for himself.

He wasn’t sure how it would possibly get any better, until the final act.

The audience was roaring even before she came out, making it clear that she was well known amongst them. And well loved. It took Will’s breath away.

“Guys, Gals and non-binary Pals, it’s your favourite, Miss Mona!”

The crowd got even louder as a beautiful woman stalked on stage. She had slightly frizzy long hair, an aesthetic which looked purposeful. She wore a sassy look and was wearing what looked to be a horse riding outfit.

The music started and she pulled out a crop. Will’s eyes went wide and his breath stopped.

*

Will was watching the stage even after it had emptied, the after images burned into his mind as the place emptied around him. He was only partially aware of the people leaving, caught up in his reflections on the evening. It had been like nothing he'd ever seen before, and every part of him cried out for more. He may have considered performing in passing before, but he'd never thought about it seriously until this night. Until seeing the looks on their faces, the joy and freedom.

"Penny for 'em," A voice next to him made him startle and drew his attention from the stage and back to the woman he'd met earlier.

"I was just… I've never seen anything like this before. It was so beautiful," Will breathed out the words, not even capable of wanting to hide his awe.

She smiled widely at him, "I'm glad it spoke to you. I'm Bev Katz, this is my place," She held out her hand and he shook it.

"Oh! Wow, okay," He blushed. He'd figured she was something to do with the management but hadn't realised she was the owner.

"Will, Will Graham," He supplied. "I just… was told I should come and see the show. I do pole and aerial silks, some boylesque. But I've never performed, I've never seen anyone perform outside of the actual dance studio."

"Huh," She replied thoughtfully, looking him up and down. "You know, we have some positions coming up for new go-go dancers, a bonus if you can do pole work. They work as intermission acts, but also perform weeknights, when we don't have an actual show. You should drop by for the open auditions. The details are all on our website. And everything is equal opportunities. Including all genders and sexualities, our biggest custom base is gay men and young women, so we like to serve a diverse palate." She grinned.

Will had been tempted to decline, just an automatic reaction to something outside of his comfort zone. But he didn't. He just nodded and smiled. He liked this woman and, at the least, doing the open audition might be an interesting experience.

"Okay, I'll look online," Will went for the non-committal response and she grinned in response.

"You do that, Will, Will Graham," She replied before wandering off towards the rapidly emptying bar.

*

"You're next," The man who had greeted him at the door and brought him through to the stage wings, muttered to him and indicated that he should walk out onto the stage. He had pretty much been in a daze since he arrived and now it was all very real.

He walked out and looked out into the audience, the lights a little bright, but he could make out three people sat at the most central table, chatting with each other over notes.

“Hey, uh…” Will started, nervous for the first time in a long while and wondering if performing might actually be completely outside of his comfort zone after all. He hadn't told Jimmy or Abi about this, but he had mentioned it in very brief detail to Barney who had encouraged him and insisted he take the afternoon off to attend. So that left him obliged to go along and he wasn't sure he was ready.

But then Bev Katz turned and saw him, her face breaking into a warm smile. “Will! The silks kid, yeah? Are you going to show us what you've got?” She asked encouragingly.

“I don't have any, um, go-go experience. But if you just want to get a feel for me, I can show you some pole work.” Will tried to baluster himself.

“Yeah? That sounds good. You have a routine prepared?” Bev asked him, not an unreasonable expectation.

“No I… um,” Will tried to think of an excuse or alternative but was coming up blank.

She shook her head and waved her hand dismissively, “Don’t sweat it.” She signalled over to the DJ in the booth just down from the stage. “Biting Down,” She instructed, “Wait till he’s on the pole.”

The DJ nodded and then turned his eyes expectantly to Will as he crossed the stage.

Then Bev turned back to Will, "Just do what you want, the track is just for backing music, it doesn't have to sync up."

Despite her words, he felt the implication there was that it really should, that his musicality was part of this try out. He wasn't overly familiar with the song, but he knew he had to make this work.

[Biting Down – Lorde]

It feels better biting down

Will felt the music for a moment and after the intro and the harder beat kicked in he pulled himself slowly up onto the pole, matching the slow and yet powerful rhythm of the song.

It feels better biting down

He took a breath and moved slowly into a pose, trying to control his nervous energy. He gripped the pole and held himself in swan pose, looking out into the audience.

He saw Bev signal to someone near the stage and suddenly the room lights plummeted leaving him in the soft stage light.

It feels better biting down

He took a deep breath, his heart racing, unable to see out into the audience now, only feeling the music. He closed his eyes and let it pulse through him, until his body was attuned completely to the beat. Until it was soul deep.

Skip a hit, don't make a sound
It feels better biting down
Breathed so deep I thought I'd drown

He let the music move him.

For three and a half minutes nothing else mattered but moving to that music. Emotions he didn’t realise he’d been holding onto felt like they were flowing out of his body. Freeing him.

The electronics of your heart
See how fast they fall apart

It feels better biting down

Will ended in an outside leg hang and there was suddenly silence.

The music had ended and he could only hear his own panted breath.

The lights went back up, making him flinch as he slowly pulled himself up and off of the pole. Bev wore a stunned expression, and he wondered quite how terrible he had been.

And then everyone in the room began to applaud and it stole Will's breath. Breathing hurt.

As the applause died down, Bev spoke.

"Wow. Will, I have to say, I couldn't stop imagining you doing just exactly what you did then on my evening stage. But, y'know, probably wearing a leather harness, or some pony play gear or something. Just. Wow."

Will's eyes went wide and his heart thudded. He was very much not against the idea of dressing up as he'd seen others do a few nights earlier, though he was sure that might be a step even further from comfort.

Bev must have clocked his deer in the headlines look, because she chuckled warmly at him, "Don't worry. We'll ease you in slow. Can you start in two weeks?"

Will's entire body prickled with nervous excitement.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Silk makes his main stage debut.

Three Months Later

Will came off his podium feeling exhilarated.

He always did, despite how exhausting things were for him right now. Working with Barney during the day and then performing pole on one of the podiums Tuesday through Thursday nights had been tiring enough. But he'd worked the last two Fridays and Saturdays as a favour to Bev as another dancer was out sick. Those performances during the intermission and then after the show and we'll into the night.

Even so, he was sure he should feel more tired than he did, but for now he was still coasting on adrenaline, topped up by strong coffee in the morning. And either way? He was kinda loving it. It might have taken a short while to grow comfortable with the leather booty shorts and mesh tank he wore on the podium, but it weirdly now felt like a second skin. An armoured one.

It had taken a couple of weeks to get the swing of things, dancing go-go the first week, until Bev had a pole fitted on one of the podiums. He was at home there, and whilst he enjoyed the thrill of audience appreciation, he didn't really even see them. Just felt the music as he moved and relaxed and was completely free.

Will had been glad when Bev had explained on his first shift, how the tips worked. All dancers were allowed to take tips, there were private rooms in back for lapdances if anyone wanted to offer private audiences under the watchful eye of the bouncers. But on stage and podium, the dancers could take money in their waistband or in a tip jar on their podium, or not at all if they preferred.

Will had gone for the tip jar. It was etiquette in the club that you only touched a dancer to put money in their clothing and if they had a jar, you didn't touch them at all. And the way Bev had explained it with such determination, Will knew that no one broke these rules because the result was a complete ban from the club. It made him feel safe. In this room full of faceless strangers, he was free and safe. It was a joyous feeling.

"I love the way you're glowing right now," Bev stood just inside the door that lead from the theatre to the dressing rooms. It was on one side of the stage, the door to the private dance rooms was on the other. He'd been given the tour his first week, but that was the only time he'd been near the private rooms.

She handed him a towel and he started to pat off sweat as they walked down the hallway.

“Thanks,” Will chuckled, unsure how else to respond to the comment.

“So Will,” Bev continued, in a tone Will was starting to recognise. “I’ve got a few stage spots coming up.”

Will slowed slightly, his hesitation clear. “I don’t… um, I’m not sure Bev. I don’t think I’m really good enough for the stage. I’ve only been performing in front of audiences for three months.”

“Pfft,” Bev waved her hand dismissively. “You’re not only a natural talent, but the audience loves you. You draw them to that podium like bugs to fire, and they all want to just eat you up.”

Will shook his head at her words, dismissing them in turn.

She rolled her eyes at him. “I know you’re in your own world up there, but you can’t miss how they look at you? Some people ask which nights you’ll be in and make sure to get a good view of your podium. On the nights where there’s no stage show, over half the room is looking at you, completely focused on you the whole night.”

Will clenched his jaw, looking ahead as they walked. Maybe he’d noticed that a little, but it really wasn’t what he was focused on. Though, he did know from conversations back stage, wide grins and slaps on the back, that his tip jar was often more full than other podium dancers.

“I’ll give you time to think about it,” Bev said as they reached the dressing rooms, “Friday night and Saturday night stage slots. Two acts, pay we’ll have to discuss, but the tips are-” She mimed a chef’s kiss, winked at him and started to walk away. “Besides, you think it feels great being up there on that pole? Imagine how amazing it feels to be performing on the stage. We might even look at getting some silks rigged up.”

She turned the corner and left Will watching after her, part of him already yearning to be on the stage.

*

"What's with you?" Abi asked as they sat in the little deck chairs outside the workshop, overlooking the forecourt that was thankfully empty. No one booked in until an oil change in the mid afternoon. It gave Will a chance to sit back and relax for a couple of hours.

Abi passed Will a sandwich and then bit into her own. It had become routine once or twice a month for her to drop by and share lunch with him, literally.

The conversation with Bev the night before was weighing on his mind, and the lack of sleep he'd been getting with all the hours he was working, was likely not helping.

He let out a heavy sigh, "I've been asked to perform on the stage at the club," he told her.

"Will!" She smacked his arm in her excitement, almost making him drop the sandwich, "That's amazing. What did you say? When do you start? Are you going to quit working here?"

He let out a frustrated sigh and sank back into the chair. "I have no idea. I mean, part of me wants to do it, but I'm not a performer."

Before he could say any more, a short sharp burst of hysterical laughter bubbled out of Abi.

"Will," She admonished, "I've seen you in the practice rooms, and I've seen you on the pole at the club, you are most definitely a performer. And a damn good one at that." She looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, "What's stopping you?"

"I don't know. I... I love performing, But…" He shook his head, not sure what exactly it was that was holding him back. There was a niggling concern that he couldn't put his finger on. He felt safe there at the moment, but thinking about performing on the stage gave him a sharp pang of vulnerability.

Abi shrugged and took another bite, chewing thoughtfully before swallowing and saying, "It's worth trying, right?"

Will shrugged in return, not able to comment further than that. For sure he knew, from their encouragement, that Barney and Jack would be cool with him reducing his hours if he needed to. And, based on what he already made on the podium, the money from the club would be good enough to allow for that even before factoring tips.

Yes, he was trepidatious about putting himself out there on the stage when he really didn't consider himself a performer no matter what anyone else might say. But there really was more to it. An anxiety he hadn't felt in a while but was rising all the more every time he considered Bev's offer.

They left the conversation there, Abi knowing him well enough now not to push. Instead conversation turned to the cute, middle-aged bear of a guy that seemed to be hanging out at the studio a lot lately and making eyes at Jimmy. They gossiped and laughed and made a note to mercilessly tease Jimmy next time they were at the studio, all the while knowing that he would give as good as he got.

That night Will went to bed exhausted, drained at the thought of performing the following evening. At least he didn't have to work at the auto shop during the day, and he really did get a buzz from performing, even if he was tired.

It was another thing to consider.

In fact, it was all a lot to consider. And that ball of anxiety in his belly was growing by the hour.

If he hadn't been so exhausted it might have taken him a while to fall to sleep, as it was he immediately plunged into a deep dream. There was darkness and rain and a voice calling for him.

He was performing on stage, but it wasn't in the club, it was in the middle of a road. In the dark and rain, just like that night of the crash.

As he danced and danced his feet began to bleed and he knew he'd been dancing forever, and was destined to continue. The voice came closer and closer and Will realised he had an audience. People sat silently at the tables in front of the stage, still as stone as they sat there in the rain.

Then the voice was closer again, calling his name and Will could see a figure in the crowd, the only movement out there.

"Will," His name over and over as the figure weaved through the obstructive tables and silent audience.

Until finally he stood in front of the stage and looked up at Will.

Matt.

Matthew Brown grinned at him, an evil expression that stilled Will's heart in fear.

"Will. I see you."

Will woke as he thrashed around the bed, trying to escape as Matt pounced onto the stage.

The sheets were wet with sweat and he was trembling. Somehow hot and cold all over with silent tears rolling down his face.

His anxiety wouldn't be ignored any longer.

*

By the time Will got to the cafe down the street from the club for lunchtime, he'd calmed down. But when he'd messaged Bev earlier that morning asking to meet for lunch, he had been freaking out.

He'd tried for it not to show in his message, keeping it casual. But the concern on her face was obvious when he walked into the cafe and found her sitting there with a coffee each for them already.

"What is it Will?" She asked before he even had a chance to pull out his chair. "You can be honest with me. I didn't mean to lay it on heavy, if you don't want to perform on the main stage I-"

Will stopped her with a shake of his head as he sat down. He pulled the coffee to him and breathed in the rich roast, before letting out a deep breath.

"It's not that. I… It just started to dawn on me where my hesitation was coming from and…" Will trailed off as he choked a little on the words.

“Baby,” Bev soothed and took hold of his hands, pulling them from his cup and squeezing them. "Tell me."

“I guess I hadn’t even realised, I’ve been pushing it down for so long. Doing so well and moving on, I.” Will sighed, unable to meet Bev’s eyes, but strangely glad of the comfort she was giving him. “I was in an abusive relationship.”

Will finally said the words, he had never said them so plainly before. It both terrified him and made him feel just a tiny bit lighter.

“Oh, Will.” Bev rubbed his hands, “I know a lot of people might say this to you, but I get it, I do. I’ve been there. Really been there. And I know it’s not the same, every situation is different. But I’ve had some experiences that means you really shouldn’t be at all hesitant or concerned to say what it is you’re about to say.”

Will looked at her then, the tone in her voice a little shaky, and he saw that her eyes slightly wet. He didn’t know if it was in sympathy for him, or at her own memories. His instincts told him it was both and he squeezed her hands back and felt stronger for it.

“It didn’t really occur to me until last night,” Will continued, feeling a little less hesitant now as he chose his words. “I had a bad dream. The first one in a long while, and my ex found me. Because I was on stage.” Will took a deep breath and felt better for having told her.

Bev was nodding, “I’ve had that fear. Believe me, the bouncers all have a photo of my ex and a copy of the restraining order. And my permission to get as heavy handed as necessary,” She smiled at him and he smiled back.

Will let out a heavy breath, feeling some relief.

“It never bothered me on the podium, I was never in the spotlight, not really. I always feel pretty anonymous up there. But when you mentioned the main stage,” He shook his head. “I… I think I’d like to do it Bev, part of me wants to be up there.”

Her smile told him she knew that much about him. It was likely clear to anyone that had ever seen him on the podium or even in practice. The way he lost himself to the dance and the music, just like his mom always had.

“I need to think about it. It scared me, this dream. And I just… I’m terrified that I’ll be up there on stage and he’ll walk in and there I am in the spotlight and…” Will trailed off, the dream coming to mind in sharp focus. Of course Matt wouldn’t really be able to hurt him, not there, not in front of everyone. But if he knew Will worked there, if he tracked him down? Then what?

The sensible part of him, told Will that this was a big suburb in a big city. Big enough that he and Matt hadn’t crossed paths since that day at the hospital.

The chances of them encountering each other were slim, and it felt so long ago now, a lifetime. Would Matt even recognise him at a glance? The years had changed Will, his face was less babyish. His body more athletic where before he had been almost scrawny. His hair

was longer, short curls now practically flowing locks almost down to his shoulders. He didn't look much like any photos of back then, not least because his eyes were different. They were alive now, for a long time, he realised upon reflection, they hadn't been.

Bev took a deep breath, squeezing his hands again before releasing them and taking up her mug to sip at her coffee. She watched him over the rim and he then did the same, closing his eyes in pleasure at the rich taste of the coffee.

He reopened his eyes when he heard the gentle sound of Bev placing her mug back down.

"I want to do it," He told her. "I just need… to be comfortable with it."

She nodded, "Of course. Look, Will, you can go out wearing a mask for all I care. But at the very least you're welcome to give the bouncers his photo. Believe me, you and I aren't the only ones who've had to do that." She reassured. "You'll go by your stage name on all promo info, we can definitely use artistic shots and nothing showing your face, if we need photos. And if worst comes to worst and the shithead turns up, I promise you now, he won't have the chance to touch a hair on your head!"

The last she said with such venom that he completely believed it. In fact, his heart swelled with a feeling of not just safety, but love. The same he felt when he thought about Barney and the Crawfords, about Jimmy and Abi. Bev was part of this found family he'd been making over the last few years, that he knew now.

"Thank you," He gave her a half smile as he tried not to let his emotions show.

"We can work it all out later, no rush. Just know, you're safe. And we're going to keep you safe Will. No one comes into my house and fucks around. I promise you that."

*

"You can't be serious!" Will felt suddenly sick and cold. "You said no rush!"

The conversation in the cafe had been almost a month earlier, and they had since had a few gentle conversations where he was clearly being eased toward the stage. He had chosen a stage name, Bev had even talked about getting the stage decked out for aerial apparatus before his debut. He was looking forward to it more and more, and really did feel like he was going to be safe.

They were old photos of course, but the bouncers knew what Matt looked like, as did the wait staff. He had been working on a few ideas that might eventually become routines and next week Bev was going to have him fitted for some costumes. He felt safe and reassured and almost ready.

And now Bev wanted him to perform ready or not!

"I'm sorry Will, I know it's short notice. But-"

"There are other dancers who-" Will started, cutting Bev off as he tried to protest.

Margot - Miss Mona - had called in. She twisted her ankle and had been told she needed two weeks resting it up at least, before she could even consider dancing on it. She was one of the club's biggest stars. He wasn't ready, he was a nobody, and there were plenty of other dancers who should be the ones to take her spot.

"You're the one I need, Will. This isn't about time served, or pecking orders. I need someone they haven't seen on the stage before, to go out there and wow them. Someone who can hold their own when the audience is expecting Mona. Hell, there are nights where I'm sure if you danced on your podium whilst the show was on, most of the audience would still be looking at you!" Bev's words were both passionate and a plea.

"I… I haven't got a costume or…" Will tried reminded her as he continued to protest, but her softening look told him she knew she'd won. He couldn't really argue with what she said. It wasn't in her interest to send someone out there who was going to be old news to the audience, no matter how fantastic they were.

"We can pull something together. Do you have a routine you've been working on?" Bev asked, though her tone made it clear that even if he said no, she'd have a response to that too.

"Maybe? I have something I've been playing with a bit in my pole practice for a while. I usually listen to Fleurie, *Hurts Like Hell* when I'm working on it." Will admitted, hesitating to call it a routine though it was at least the bare bones of one.

"Great, good song! We're going to move the line up around and fit you at the end. So that there's no expectation of a second act from you, I'm going to put you on as the final act of the second half in Mona's place. That way we can end on a high of marking your debut, they'll lap it up."

"Bev!" Will startled at her words, expecting just to be slotted in somewhere to pad out the running order, her previous words now slotting into his mind. "I… You can't put me as the headline act."

"Huh, I can't? Weird, because this is my club and that's exactly what I'm doing." Bev grinned at him and booped his nose. "Let's find you something to wear. And you need to tell me what you decided for your stage name."

*

Given that he was going to do a pole routine, they found and borrowed some suitable attire that was both more and less than what he usually wore when on the podium. His usual leather shorts were fine, Bev deemed, but she said no to the mesh tank and replaced it with a leather harness that fit in such a way as to show off the vast majority of his flesh, including his nipples.

Those were covered with white leather nipple pasties, and then Bev added white leather cuffs to give him a black and white look that felt intentionally coordinated and not thrown together.

"Here," Bev pulled him to another part of the dressing room, other performers parting like the sea in front of him, all keen to watch and be caught up in this moment with him. "Silks," She

told him, pulling out a bag full of what looked like huge silk handkerchiefs. She pulled out all the white ones and then positioned him with his arms outstretched at the sides as she started to weave them into the harness.

There were appreciative mutterings amongst the few other performers and then one of them was next to him applying extra makeup on his eyes.

“You need more,” He said, “The stage lights are brighter, you need heavier makeup. We can do a better job next time.”

“Uhuh,” Will managed, trying not to nod and smear the liquid eyeliner.

“There,” Bev said, stepping back and grinning at him.

Will sort of felt like he should feel ridiculous. But looking in the mirror and seeing that version of himself standing there, strong and full of life, he just loved it.

The harness was perfect, showing off his frame. Making him look sturdier than he was, but the way his hair fell, with wisps of curls at the back of his neck, he looked equally as soft. Added to that was the silk, it covered all the flesh that had been exposed, making him look soft and sort of angelic.

“Right, just…” Bev started as she tugged little bits here and there to get them just right. “There are four silks,” she pointed to the little bits that she’d left hanging down for him to be able to take hold of, clearly. “Just pull one off now and then, maybe leave the two across your chest until the end? But go with what feels right, you know the music.”

Will nodded, zoning out from the activity in the room and focusing on himself in the full length mirror he’d been deposited in front of.

“I can do this,” Will told himself in the mirror.

He was looking at himself so intently that he didn’t even see Bev was behind him until she grabbed him and spun him around, taking hold of the tops of his arms in a firm grasp.

“You’re Will Graham. You were born to do this. You can do this!” She told him and he nodded. Then she grinned at him and said, “You’re Silk, and you were born to do this!”

Hearing the stage name he’d chosen said aloud sent a shiver all over Will.

He was Silk.

He was. He was fluid and graceful, even more so when he was on actual silks. He was one with them and they were part of him. Part of who he had become, who he was always meant to be.

The hallway passed in a daze as he moved towards the wings of the stage, every performer he passed wishing him to break a leg, kissing his cheek, smiling. So much love for him, he could barely stand it.

Bev stood there at his side, looking out onto the stage as the compere stepped on from the opposite side, passing the performer who was going off.

“Now my friends,” He started in a low and conspiratorial tone, “I know you were all upset to hear that Miss Mona isn’t able to join us tonight.” He allowed time for the audience to let out a collective aww of sadness. “But, didn’t I promise you something special?” He pepped up and the audience did too, shouting “Yeah” back at him and whistling and cheering.

They cheered all the more when two of the stage hands began to wheel out and then secure, centre stage, a pole podium. They received whistles of appreciation as they winked and waved at the audience before moving back off stage.

Will could feel the collective pulse of the audience running through him, and instead of being nervous he was exhilarated.

“Here, in his debut performance, that you. Yes you! All of you lucky people are here to witness! Please, welcome to the stage, Silk!”

He swept his hand wide and backed into the wings as the music struck up, slow and melodious tones a counterbalance to the energy of the host. It hushed the crowd.

Bev leaned into him, “You’ve got this kiddo.” She slapped his ass and he felt hysterical laughter threatened to bubble up and out of him. He waited for the right beat and stepped onto the stage.

There was an instant cheer, whoops and hollers, and people shouting “hell yeah!” from those who recognised Will from his pole dancing slots.

Will placed one foot slowly in front of the other, moving like water towards the pole as the whole audience hushed around him.

[Hurts Like Hell – Fleurie]

How can I say this without breaking
How can I say this without taking over
How can I put it down into words

Will gripped the pole and pulled himself up into a front hook and letting the weight of his body take him around the pole in a fluid motion.

When it's almost too much for my soul alone

He looked out into the audience and they cheered, hushing quickly when he started to move again, sinking into the sensuality he was offering them.

I loved, and I loved and I lost you
I loved, and I loved and I lost you
I loved, and I loved and I lost you

He moved into a swan pose, holding it for a moment, starting to sway and spin around the pole as the music changed tempo just a little.

And it hurts like hell
Yeah, it hurts like hell
I don't want them to know the secrets

As the words became more intense he moved all the more fluidly, spinning out into a superwoman pose and letting his body move effortlessly around the pole.

I don't want them to know the way I loved you
I don't think they'd understand it, no
I don't think they would accept me, no

Will slowed almost to stopping, catching his breath, panting. Purposely so, letting the audience feel the exertion of the emotions. Letting them feel the emotions with him. For that part of him that mourned what he thought he was going to have and never did when he met Matty. What he had wanted and Matty hadn't been able to give.

He felt the emotion of years of letting go of the idea that it might have been his fault, that he was simply unloveable. He let it go and let the audience feel that too as they loved him.

As he savoured each gasp and sigh he drew from them.

I loved, and I loved and I lost you
And it hurts like hell
Yeah, it hurts like hell

The music thundered through him and he moved. One moment he was swinging around the pole as though it was no effort and then he flew free of it, dismounting swiftly and gracefully, without missing a beat.

Dreams fight with machines
Inside my head like adversaries

The audience cheered and he stalked to the edge of the stage, moving his body with the music.

Come wrestle me free
Clean from the war

As those words were sung, he pulled first one and then the other silk that covered his lower torso.

Your heart fits like a key
Into the lock on the wall

He let the silks drop to the stage as he turned his back on the audience, stalking back towards the pole as they cheered and hollered.

I turn it over
I turn it over
But I can't escape

Will stood before the pole, back to the audience, letting his head fall forward and taking a deep and heavy breath. He felt the audience breath it with him.

And then they cheered again as he pulled the two remaining silks free. He let them flutter and swung back onto the pole. Moving around it too fast for them to really see the flesh he had revealed.

I turn it over
I turn it over

Will moved into a lay out pose so slowly that there was no way the audience could miss any part of him. The gasps and cheers made that clear and he dropped back down into a superwoman pose for them.

I loved, and I loved and I lost you
I loved, and I loved and I lost you
I loved, and I loved and I lost you

Will took a shuddering breath and pulled himself back to the pole, curling around it, making himself as small and fragile as possible whilst the final words rang through the stage and out over the audience.

And it hurts like hell.

The music ended and the audience roared to life and into a standing ovation.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Sutcliffe drags Hannibal out for a much needed night off... straight into Bar Katz.

Four Months Later

“Will, this has to be your best night yet!” Bev grinned at him as she handed over an envelope full of cash - all the tips from his jar that was passed around the tables during his act.

He’d performed a routine he'd first put together when he’d started working on the main stage of the club a few months earlier. Will had been so busy working on new material and rehearsals were killing him, so he’d decided to fall back onto an older routine and hope that the audience hadn’t seen it already or didn’t get bored if they had.

Will could feel the weight of the coins but the notes also, in the stuffed envelope and raised a brow. He hadn’t expected to make much with an 'old' routine, despite Bev’s reassurances the week before when he'd told her he'd be reusing the act.

She grinned wider and put her arm around his shoulders, “What I tell ya? The audience loves something familiar. As long as you don’t over do it, they’ll never hate you for bringing back a routine they loved seeing you perform before. You got yourself some fans!”

Will nodded and smiled, letting out a breath.

“Yeah, that’s good.” He managed, still not quite sure what to do with the idea that he had fans. People that came back to watch him perform. It put a pressure on him beyond just not fucking up on stage. But it was more than that. Deep down he would always have that fear of Matt being in the audience. What if Matt was one of his fans? What if he was just waiting…

Will shook the thought away. Putting a lid back on it, as he had to every time the idea crawled through his brain.

“You look shattered baby, go home and sleep. You did real good tonight.” Bev told him and pressed a kiss to his cheek before letting go and walking back towards her office.

Will nodded to her back and then grabbed his bag to head out.

He found himself strangely glad that one of the other dancers was giving him a ride home, as he did now and then. Will didn’t want to grab a taxi and it was a little too far to walk. The fact was, as much as he tried to hide it, the idea of having fans and people knowing him, was overwhelming even without factoring in Matt.

Shadow Moon was more of a Chippendale type stripper than a boylesque performer, and had quite a following of female fans in the audience. Will knew he did a lot of private dances for bachelorette parties and the like.

“Ready?” Shadow asked as he let himself out of one of the changing rooms.

“Yeah,” Will nodded and smiled, walking out to the car in companionable silence. Once settled in for the twenty minute drive passed Will’s place, Shadow looked over at the envelope in Will’s hand.

“Shit kid, you’re doing really well. Some performers take years to get as popular as you, or become bitter trying!” Shadow chuckled, putting the car into gear and pulling out of the lot.

Will felt his cheeks heat and pushed the envelope into his pocket as Shadow chuckled again.

“Making that much money on tips, you should try private dances,” Shadow said seriously. “I know you don’t often do the tips in your waistband sort of routines, but private dances aren’t like that. There’s absolutely no touching, and you can pretty much set your price. If you’re making that much in tips…” Shadow let out a long whistle.

Will let out a sigh and shook his head, “It’s not just touching… I just… I…” He trailed off and shrugged.

Touching was a big part of it for Will. He'd always considered himself a good judge of people before being blindsided by Matt. Having strangers touch him pulled him out of the headspace he sought to find whilst dancing. But even if no touching was guaranteed, Will needed dance to be his sanctuary, and being one on one with the audience would pull him from that. He'd be too focused on the whites of their eyes.

Will realised Shadow had misread his tone for fear when he responded quickly, “Of course, it’s totally cool. You never have to do anything there that you don’t want. Just keep the option in mind if you ever feel like it.”

Will smiled at the intent, knowing that everyone at the club knew his situation to various extents. And as Bev had said a long while before, he wasn't the only one who had an ex's photo with security.

Shadow dropped the subject completely and changed to asking about whether Will was going fishing soon as he’d brought them all in an amazing fish pie with his catch the last time he had.

Will was grateful for the subject change. Bev had mentioned many times before about private dances until he’d had to tell her he really wasn’t interested. She hadn’t pushed, but something in his expression or voice must have made her realise it was a lost cause.

And whilst he was sure the bouncers would keep him safe, there was a niggling fear about Matt. Even if subconsciously. The first time Bev had seriously brought up private dances, he’d gone home to bed and had one of the worst nightmares he’d had in years. He was trapped, sometimes in a room but in flashes it was his mom’s car again. And then Matt was there and the music was playing and Matt made him dance. And when he didn’t dance the way Matt wanted, Matt hit him until he fell to the floor. And then the antlered man held him down and crushed the breath out of him.

Will shuddered at the memory of the dream. Waking up shaking, in a bed drenched in his sweat as he hadn't for a long while, had been unnerving.

Will shook again and let out a heavy breath.

“You cold?” Shadow asked, starting to fiddle with the heat settings as he drove.

Will shook his head, “Just tired. Sorry. But you know… you can come fishing with me the next time I go if you like.”

Shadow smiled, “Yeah? Can I bring Sweeney, my husband? I mean… he’ll just tell shit jokes and sit out in a deck chair expecting someone to wait on him with booze, but…” Shadow looked like he was talking himself out of it and Will laughed.

“Yeah, of course.”

The mood lightened and Will was smiling when he got out of the car.

*

Hannibal contained the frustrated cry he wanted to unleash, but slammed his fists down onto the table nonetheless. Though even that wasn’t as fiercely as he could have, managing to temper himself a little.

“Han, don’t-” Sutcliffe started. Hannibal hadn’t even heard the other doctor enter the room, but cut him off with a hand held up.

A hand that less than an hour before had been covered in the blood of a young boy who had been beaten by his father. A boy he hadn't been able to save from the cracked rib that had punctured his little lung.

Another day of wondering if he could keep doing this. Another day of knowing he really couldn’t, and wished he’d quit the first time he’d felt this way, or the second. Or at least the time when he really had intended to and Sutcliffe had somehow convinced him to give it a little more time.

Hannibal prided himself on being an exemplary doctor and surgeon. Working in an Emergency Room had felt one of the broadest uses of his wide ranging skills as a doctor and later as a surgeon. Losing a patient was always a blow to him. A wound in his pride, and a failure on his record. But ones like these, abuse, cut him deep inside. More than a blemish on his record, it was a personal failure that felt like some sort of responsibility.

“He was never going to make it,” Sutcliffe growled, not happy that Hannibal had tried to silence the words he had known were coming.

He had been so severely injured, but if anyone would have been able to save him, Hannibal knew it would have been him. And he didn’t. Couldn’t. His little body couldn’t take any more.

He knew why Sutcliffe was annoyed, and it wasn’t just at being cut off. He was perfectly aware of how he was perceived. Cold and distant - good characteristics for a surgeon. But also, his reactions to these loses were often seen by those around him as no more than anger at having that death on his record. Having not been able to play god in that moment, caring nothing for the life in his hands other than as a number on his stats. He was sure many of them despised him for it.

But he had never done anything to discourage this view. He knew it came in part from how he came across, for he had certainly never confided to anyone that this was his feeling. And he would never confide to them that it wasn’t true either.

Hannibal had no plans to confide that every time a life slipped through his fingers all he could see was Mischa's face before him. That his manner and coldness was not his lack of compassion, but his need to quash any compassion in order to remain in control.

Sutcliffe let out a heavy sigh and looked at the clock on the staff room wall. "Shifts over, I'm taking you for a drink. You need to loosen up before you strain something."

Hannibal looked at the man and cocked a brow, to which Sutcliffe held up his hands in all innocence. Perhaps against his better judgement, Hannibal found himself responding with a curt nod.

They both went to their lockers and changed before Sutcliffe ordered them a taxi to a bar he liked, near a club he liked, to drink the drinks he liked. Hannibal nodded and went along with it, considering that Sutcliffe might actually be right. He needed to loosen up and relax with himself a little more.

*

Will took a breath and let it out with a shudder.

The costume was barely there, and what was there sparkled and shone. Tiny black shorts and a harness made of black silk. It had taken a while to put the costume together, to get it quite right. He wanted to have something that not only spoke of who he was on stage - Silk - but also fitting of what he was about to do.

"You look nervous baby, you'll be fine." Bev squeezed his shoulder as she came up behind him, now both standing looking in the full length mirror in the dressing room.

Will had worked hard on this routine. He really wanted to take things to the next level and wow the audience. Give his name meaning.

But more than that, he didn't want to disappoint Bev. He smiled at her in the mirror.

"Bit nervous, yeah. I… Bev, the amount of money you put into having the aerial rigging installed, I-"

"Pfft," She dismissed him with a wave of her hand. "The club always needs work. An investment is an investment. In my club, in you. In other performers." She shrugged as she grinned at him. And he knew then how excited she was about this as well.

This was it, the opening night of the new aerial rigging. A couple of performers from the circus school had been hired for the night to give it that sort of feel - breathing fire and walking on nail beds on the podiums.

And now Will was waiting to end the show, he could hear the MC from the stage, doing a little musical number of their own on the apron, to entertain whilst the silks were prepared.

"Come on," Bev grinned at him and took his hand. They walked to the stage wings together.

Will took a breath and glided out onto the stage.

*

Hannibal's breath caught in his throat.

The young man who had sauntered out onto the stage was beautiful. Ethereal.

He had to allow that the alcohol in his system may have enhanced his perception, but he was sure not by much. There was something vulnerable about him, despite the clear strength in his body. Hannibal couldn't quite put his finger on it, but the vulnerability seemed familiar, and made his heart ache.

Despite most of the acts so far being a mixture of male and female striptease routines, this young man was already almost nude. He wore tight black shorts that sparkled subtly as he moved, and the rest of his body was covered in what appeared to be ribbon. It wrapped around him in almost a weblike shape, strategically covering his nipples. Hannibal had never before longed to see someone naked, as he did in that moment.

He shook the thought away. Not just the impropriety of it, but also a reaction to others in the room seeing him naked. He didn't even know the performer's name and already felt possessively jealous. Emotions he rarely felt, or rarely had someone to feel them over. And now he had been reduced to the mindset of a tipsy teenager, lusting after the unobtainable and daydreaming it to be more.

"Be generous people, the tip jar is coming around. Because without further ado! Here you are, guys, gals and non-binary pals. One of your favourites, debuting a NEW act, on our NEW apparatus. The sensational - Silk." The host introduced, exiting the stage to rapturous applause as the performer took to the centre.

"Silk," Hannibal repeated unconsciously, feeling the word melt on his tongue.

Silk.

Yes, he could imagine the feel of the boy's soft skin against his own. He wet his lips with his tongue, eyes not leaving the stage as Silk gave an almost coy smile and held up his arms.

His body was lithe and perfect, Hannibal's type in many ways. Though he had rarely been with men since he started his professional career. Or anyone for that matter. So perhaps Silk reminded him of his college flings, not including Sutcliffe. All young and eager.

Hannibal felt his cock throb with interest, clearly a lot less inhibited than usual, thanks to the alcohol Sutcliffe had plied him with. The man sat next to him, mesmerised by the stage too, but a knowing and expectant grin on his face.

He held his breath as he watched the stage, a large glittering cobweb was being lowered down, toward the back of the stage. And as it came, Silk guided it in a way that almost looked like he was spinning it. This had all happened in less than a minute to the awed silence of the room, but to Hannibal it had felt like a lifetime. His heart was racing. He hadn't expected high quality entertainment, despite what Sutcliffe had said, but the show so far had been amazing and now he was transfixed.

[Addicted To You – Avicii]

I don't know just how it happened, I let down my guard
Swore I'd never fall in love again but I fell hard

Silk moved in front of the web as it now settled on the stage, the music slowly rose to life as he moved gracefully. Dancing, teasingly in front of the web. And then he was pulling parts away, thick ribbons.

Not ribbons, Hannibal realised as Silk moved like water, wrapping them around his arms whilst moving to the music in the most sensual way Hannibal had ever seen.

I wasn't looking where I was going; I fell into your eyes
You came into my crazy world like a cool and cleansing wave

He was startled from his rapt attention when a cheer went up from the crowd. Silk had lifted himself with the aerial silks, his arms flexing but you wouldn't know from his face that it took any kind of effort. More cheering continued, whoops and hollering too, as Silk unravelled to the ground, taking a knee, perfectly in time with the music. And then he was up again.

Hannibal's breath shuddered from him as the boy took to the aerial silks, still keeping tempo as he contorted his body beautifully whilst he hung above the stage. So effortless and graceful.

I'm addicted to you, hooked on your love
Like a powerful drug I can't get enough of
Lost in your eyes, drowning in blue

Hannibal couldn't ignore his racing pulse, taking a sip of his drink.

"Making you thirsty?" Sutcliffe's teasing and slightly slurred words, jarred Hannibal back to reality. Sutcliffe fell back into his seat.

"He's beautiful isn't he," Sutcliffe said, not a question, as they both turned to watch the stage.

Out of control, what can I do?
I'm addicted to you!

Despite the pleasant smile, Silk never made eye contact with anyone in the audience, his gaze only sweeping over them a handful of times. Hannibal desperately wanted their eyes to meet. Wanted the boy to know the effect he had on him.

Hannibal clenched his jaw and internally reprimanded himself for being so vulgar.

Midnight blows in through the window; dances round the room
Got me hypnotized; I'm getting high on the perfume.

The tipjar, rather full already with a mixture of fives and singles, reached their table just as Silk rolled down rather dramatically from the silks to gracefully drop to the stage. It was

practically a ballet! Hannibal watched in awe as Silk danced back to the cobweb, dancing in front of it in a rather alluring manner.

“Why do I suddenly feel like a fly?” Hannibal muttered, not loud enough for Sutcliffe to hear apparently, or perhaps he too was mesmerised by the young man.

I couldn't live without you now, oh, I know I'd go insane
I wouldn't last one night alone, baby
I couldn't stand the pain!
I'm addicted to you, hooked on your love

That flare of jealousy sparked again and Hannibal scalded himself once more. How crass to be so infatuated just on looks alone. Even if there was a familiarity about him, Hannibal was slightly shaken by his own uncharacteristic behaviour.

It had been years since he’d really had an emotional response to someone, and it seemed ridiculous to have one for someone he had never even talked to.

Perhaps…

Like a powerful drug I can't get enough of
Lost in your eyes, drowning in blue
Out of control, what can I do?
I'm addicted to you!

The song was nearing its end and Hannibal couldn’t pull his eyes away as Silk seemingly climbed onto or into the web, as it tilted back slightly to become much like a hammock. Silk sprawled out on his back in the newly created sling of web, toes pointed and body perfectly posed as the web began to hoisted smoothly back up above the stage, taking Silk with it.

The audience erupted into applause and whistling, many stood, obscuring Hannibal’s view of the stage as the curtains closed.

He went to stand but Sutcliffe placed a hand on his arm and shook his head, “Silk never does encores.”

Hannibal’s jaw clenched, not thrilled with being so obvious, especially in front of Sutcliffe.

But he remained in his seat, his attention drawn as the crowd died down, to Sutcliffe putting a handful of single bills into the tipjar. He was about to pass it to the next table when Hannibal stilled him and pulled out his own wallet.

He took out two of the crisp hundred dollar bills and folded them, before pressing them in amongst the cash.

Sutcliffe laughed and passed the jar on then.

“You’ve got it bad,” He teased. “I would suggest you get a private dance with the kid but he never does those either. I’ve asked.” Sutcliffe chuckled.

*

Lured, that's how Hannnibal liked to think of it. Silk was a spider and he was the fly.

This was his eighth night off over the last two months that Hannibal found himself at Bar Katz, sitting at a table near the back to get a great view of the show. The performers never failed to amaze, least of all Silk.

Hannibal had considered more than once, that this behaviour, this new interest, was a coping mechanism. In fact he couldn't deny that. He had handed in his notice and had to work out another couple of months, pulling his usual shifts whilst spending any free time preparing to essentially go back to school to switch his specialism to psychiatry. The thought was at once freeing and terrifying, a big leap to make. At least he had the family money behind him to know that finances wouldn't be an issue. All the same, it was a stressful time.

And this was the only stress relief he allowed himself, if it could be called that. If anything it invigorated him. Seeing Silk perform made him feel alive and in control. After years of putting off moving from the ER, he felt moved to do it now, and couldn't deny that coming here gave him some strength in that. This place exuded a force of will present in all the performers. One he wished to harness for himself.

Other than the first night when Sutcliffe had brought him, Hannibal had attended alone and taken a table for two, his usual table now. Even the bar staff knew his order. He wondered if he should be worried about that, about this habit. But it wasn't exactly unhealthy. He wasn't obsessed, he merely enjoyed the entertainment, especially that which Silk brought to him.

Enough that this particular evening, he found himself asking whether he would do a private dance, regardless of what Donald had said.

*

"He's here again tonight," Bev grinned as she handed Will the stuffed tipjar, knowing instantly what she meant. Knowing he didn't need to look in the jar to know that it was full of small bills, except the one or two larger ones tucked into the middle. "In fact, I'm pretty sure I know who it is. I can point him out if you like?"

Will rolled his eyes at her and she chuckled. He sighed and gave her a look he hoped conveyed that he was not up for her teasing. And thankfully she said no more.

He did look down when handed the jar, and the two, one hundred dollar bills, sat there rather obviously. It made Will feel weird, he winced.

"I think I might stop with the jar," He told Bev.

"Are you nuts? You make the best tips, only Mona comes half as close."

Will let out a sigh and frowned.

"Oh, here comes grumpy Will," Bev commented, grinning. He frowned at her all the more.

"I don't like someone putting so much in there. It's a lot of money, it's not a tip." Will grumbled. He liked the tips, they made life easier, but these increasingly frequent crazy large tips made him feel uncomfortable. He felt pissed at the person giving them. Every time, he'd put the cash into a jar in his cupboard when he got home, no intention of spending it when he didn't feel like he'd really earned it.

All he did was dance and now some rich guy was throwing cash at him like this.

“Hush,” Bev told him and ruffled his hair. “What have I told you before? They’re just chumps. You go out there to dance because you love it. I know I pay you reasonable money, so the tips are just a bonus. If some chump wants to tip big that’s on them. If they think you’re being exploited and they’re doing you a favour, then they are the fool. They don’t realise they are the one that’s being exploited.” She sighed fondly at him. “Trust me baby, stripclubs have been this way since the beginning of time. Embrace it.”

Will nodded, he knew all of this. They’d had this conversation before, but this big tipper felt different. He’d never had this much from one person before and he couldn’t help feeling a little uneasy.

*

It was a week later when Bev caught him after the first half of the show as he sat in the dressing room preparing for his second half act.

"Will, look, I know you don't do private dances, but I said I'd ask. Because I'm pretty sure the guy I just talked to out there, is the one who has been stuffing those big tips in your jar." She winced even as she said it, clearly anticipating Will's responding scowl. "He's been asking the wait staff for a while, apparently. But obviously they'd been saying no, and he’s been polite and all. Not pushy, but they thought they should tell me. I went and had a chat with him, he seems like a real stand-up guy, just a fan-"

"What the fuck? No. No private dances," Will said before standing up so fast his chair almost fell. Starting to walk off, he stopped and turned back to her. "I knew this would happen. He can't buy me."

"Okay," Bev nodded. "I just thought I'd ask. And it's cool not to. Though please let me reassure you, he seemed nice. Charming even. Not the creeper I was expecting, so don't worry over it, okay?"

Will remained where he was and Bev looked at him expectantly for a moment, and he knew she saw the rising concern on his face.

"It's not…" No, it couldn't be Matt. Where would he get that sort of money? But who else would be so persistent about getting him alone?

Bev clearly read the situation and held up her hands, her eyes wide, "Oh, no, no Will. It's not your ex. I have that photo memorised, as do the door staff. It's not him. You're safe here, okay?"

Will nodded slowly, realising how fast his heart was beating.

"Where is he sat?" Will asked, he trusted Bev but he needed to make sure. To really know he was safe.

"Back row, table for two to the left of centre. He sits alone, usually wears a suit and tie. Looks neat and tidy. Had some kind of accent." Bev said all this in a reassuring tone, and Will nodded.

It didn't sound like Matt, but the man was great at charm and manipulation in equal measures.

*

"Here he is. Silk!" The MC's words were almost a whisper as he introduced Will.

He was sure the audience were likely looking to the wings for him, but this was the first time trying out the small gantry that had been rigged up. He'd scaled up and taken hold of the silks.

Will closed his eyes and took his position, hanging in the silks he had wrapped around himself, as they were slowly lowered into the audiences view.

The music started and there were gasps and applause.

Will felt his heart swell and he only wished the day hadn't already been marred, because this was so extraordinary. So wonderful a feeling that he wished he could just revel in it.

Instead he found himself going through the motions a little. Performing, for the first time, the entire act on silks. No stage work. A few more gasps from the audience as he unravelled fast towards it before grabbing the silks and moving back up.

He knew he couldn't entirely relax until…

Will moved into the new position, letting himself hang upside down, arms out wide as he looked over the audience.

And there he was.

It wasn't Matt. Upside down in his field of vision was a man he'd never forget.

Doctor Lecter.

Will shuddered at the memory of meeting him. The circumstances. Will let out a sharp but barely audible cry and closed his eyes. He remembered how safe and warm the doctor had made him feel, but it was a memory marred by pain. Physical and emotional.

He missed a beat. Just one. Not noticeable. And then threw himself back into the routine with vigor. He moved like water, feigned near misses and then finally, finally returned to his starting pose. He panted, breathless as the curtain came down and the crowd roared.

He was trembling when the silks lowered and he was able to step onto the stage and make his way off the wings.

Bev stood waiting, astounded.

"Will," she said his name breathlessly. "That was phenomenal."

Her astonishment turned to concern when she saw the tears in his eyes.

"What's wrong-" she started but he cut her off with a shake of his head.

He barely managed to croak the words, "I'll do it. The private dance," before making his way to the dressing room.

After all, he owed the guy, right?

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Courting via love notes and drawings?

Chapter Notes

feat. a gorgeous aesthetic by EleSophieSparkling

Will heard Bev suck in a breath before she closed the dressing room door behind her.

The room was busy, people getting changed or doing makeup, and Will had taken a seat at one of the big mirrors to remove his makeup.

“You don’t have to, Will.” Bev said as she dropped into the chair next to him, making eye contact via the mirror.

She sounded concerned, and Will knew it was likely the circumstances around how he’d agreed to finally do a private dance. He had just come off stage and had clearly been emotional, still was. Still hadn’t come down from the routine nor seeing that his secret admirer was Doctor Lecter.

“I do… I can’t explain it right now,” Will countered quietly, but then pulled on the smile he knew she needed. “And I want to do it. Honestly, I do.”

And he did.

Yes, part of him felt obliged, and perhaps Doctor Lecter felt he was owed that same obligation. And that was fine, even if Will felt a bit burned by that. But really, he did want to dance for Lecter, he wanted to be in the same room with him again and thank him for helping to change his life.

“You-” Bev started again but Will smiled and shook his head.

“Not right now, I can’t… Um, I need some time to build up to it. So can you tell him no? For now. When I’m ready, if he’s still coming to the club and still wants me to dance, then I’ll do it.”

Bev sighed a little with relief then and Will wondered whether she was worried that she might have pushed him into it somewhat.

“I’m glad, that you’re going to wait.” She smiled. “When you’re ready, *if* you’re ready, then you just let me know and I’ll have him taken to one of the rooms.”

Will smiled and nodded, strangely happy that she seemed so certain he would still be coming to the shows.

Because Will found himself wanting to know the man was in the audience again.

*

Last time he’d come to the club he’d spoken with Ms Katz personally and she had politely told him that Silk would not dance privately. But there had been something in the way she’d said it that made him hopeful that he had, at least, not caused offence in the asking.

He had nodded and smiled and took it with good grace. He had heard it directly from the woman in charge now, and that was as good as hearing it from Silk himself, and so Hannibal resolved that he had to be satisfied with that.

And he was, in some regards. He was happy to watch the boy perform, and to continue to fill his tip jar like a teenager with a crush, and more money than sense. But he couldn’t help but feel conscious of having pushed so hard. Something he would never have done, had it not been for the strange connection he felt, or perhaps just imagined, between them.

Either way, as he sat there watching the show and waiting for Silk’s performance, he took a napkin from the table and the fountain pen from the inner pocket of his jacket and scrawled a short note of apology. He waited for Silk and his tip jar and then pushed the note inside.

~I apologise for my persistence, I hope I caused no offence.

He had been mesmerised once more and felt an ache of desire he knew he shouldn’t. But of course, he expected no response in return. But as he left that night, the waitress came to clear his table and she leaned in for just a moment to speak quietly.

“He says no offence was taken,” She flashed him a grin and turned back to the bar without another word. Hannibal hadn’t been able to contain his smile.

A spark of something there. Not quite hope, but the opening of a two way communication that Hannibal was happy to take.

When he next had the chance to return for a show, Hannibal had taken the time to write a short note at home to bring with him.

~I hope you’ll allow me an attempt to convey how much joy your performances bring. Your talent and beauty are extraordinary.

Hannibal had written it over, several times. It was too much, he knew. But he had several versions that were more florid. He had wanted to say these words, but could think of no other

way of putting them across without sounding so enamoured.

As he left that evening, the same waitress as before cleared his table and leaned in to say, “He says thanks.” She pulled back grinning, “He blushed when he said it,” She winked at him and walked off.

When Hannibal returned home that night, he was unable to stop himself from taking the art supplies out in his office. He hadn’t had much time for them in years. Perhaps the occasional anatomical drawing, that at least he could persuade himself was related to his work.

Now he pulled out the paper and pencils and began to sketch from memory. Silk’s beautiful face, in the dreamlike quality he had whilst performing, but this time with a blush. He added it so softly with a red pencil, the only tinge of colour in the black and grey sketch, that he looked truly flushed.

Hannibal finished the art and looked down. It was mesmerising. Silk was mesmerising.

He couldn’t help but let out a chuckle at his ridiculous behaviour. He felt as giddy as a school boy, not that he had ever been this way as a youngster.

And he knew, that so much of this was tied up in his work stress. He wasn’t blind to the escapism he found in the shows. And it was for that reason, he realised, he needed to not send any more notes. As much as he wanted to, it was unfair to involve the boy in his own ridiculousness.

He pulled out another sheet of paper and started over fresh, creating a perfect portrait of Silk performing, wrapped in the silk ribbons and suspended over the stage.

It was the early hours of the morning before he finished, setting it aside on his desk before finally going to bed.

It was three weeks before Hannibal was able to get to another show, and he took the sketch with him, rolled so as not to crease it.

Silk’s performance was so beautiful as he moved gracefully just above the stage, skimming it with his hands when he hung down. He wore just small shorts and a harness across his chest that covered his nipples. His standard attire, Hannibal had come to realise. Though tonight it was red and glittering. The glitter was all over his skin too and sparkled with every movement.

When the tip jar came to his table, Hannibal pushed the drawing down into the centre of it, resolved to be his last contact in this way.

He hadn’t even planned to wait and see if the wait staff brought him a response. Instead, he made his way towards the exit without lingering, but the waitress caught him by the arm all the same.

“Hey, this is for you.”

She handed him a small folded note, glitter ingrained in it. Glitter that had transferred from Silk's hand. Hannibal took it with a shaky breath and a polite nod, waiting until he was outside to open it.

~Was that your drawing? You're very talented. You've made me look beautiful. Like someone I barely recognise. Thank you.

Hannibal felt a rush of heat to his face, and pressed the note to his chest before sliding it into his breast pocket. He resolved in that moment he wouldn't mention a word of this to Sutcliffe, or worse yet, Mischa. The teasing would be unrelenting.

*

Will felt that flutter again, the one he started to have every time his tip jar came backstage on the nights that he saw Doctor Lecter in the audience.

Not that he looked for the man every show or anything.

They had exchanged short notes several times now, and Will looked forward to getting each one. His palms a little sweaty as he tried not to seem too eager to retrieve his jar.

Lecter was smart and funny, and a talented artist. In very short notes he managed to both flatter and amuse. And Will was, ridiculously, starting to feel like the heroine in a regency novel.

Lecter hadn't asked to see him again, and his notes were always polite and respectful. And so Will replied in kind, despite the temptation to say there and then how much he appreciated everything the doctor had done back when they first met. But the fact that Lecter never made mention of it in his notes, held Will back all the more. Perhaps he was just trying to make Will feel that there was no obligation there? Though they both knew there was. If nothing else, it was clear from the notes, that the man was a gentleman, and entirely prim and proper. Will had the sense he would never outright state the obligation.

The jar was finally plonked in front of him at his makeup station and Will uttered his thanks. He cleared his throat and took his time to empty the jar, trying to act nonchalant.

Will gently folded the bills into an envelope, setting to one side the note that had been amongst them. His palms were sweating when he opened the note and another small sketch fell out. This time of Will in a dress, looking every inch the performer.

Will gasped and his heart fluttered a little. He'd been considering experimenting with some more feminine attire, which he had mentioned in passing in a previous note.

He opened the note.

~Dearest Silk. I hope you don't mind but I took a great liberty with this drawing. Rather than recreating your perfect vision from memory, I decided to look forward - a dance tableau. Something in a few of your more recent routines put this to mind, and a

previous mention you made of drag. And whilst I have sketched only in pencil, I can imagine the dress a vivid red. Forever your fan, Hannibal Lecter.

Will let out a shaky breath and called over one of the stage hands, “Can you ask Bev to come see me before the show is over? I need her to arrange something for me.”

*

Will shook out the veiled fans and walked out on stage. His second, and final, performance for the evening. Going on just before Mona’s headline act, as they often did now. Switching around and occasionally making way for a guest headliner. And Will found himself grateful of it tonight, glad that he wouldn’t be the last on stage. That he would have time before the show ended.

It had been a while since he had performed something other than an aerial routine. And it was the first time he would be performing with this type of fan, in a deep red.

Hannibal always sat in the same spot, and it was easy to find him, though Will didn’t dare look at first.

Will had seen silk fans used before many times in the most sensual way, and he’d been practising for long weeks.

His intention was far from sensual. There was something about the fans and the way they flowed, the way the silk fell and how he could play with that, that had taken his idea in a different direction. Something more playful.

And, perhaps, he had to admit, he felt a little more buoyant than usual. Had more of a spring in his step. Enough so that he knew this was the day he was going to accept Hannibal Lecter for a private dance.

Enough to know that he wanted to perform something fun and alive.

[Ex’s & Oh’s - Elle King]

As the music started up, Will stalked onto the stage, fans closed and slung over his shoulders, with the silk hanging down over his chest. He was wearing a harness, as was his signature look, but this one was altogether different - framing around his chest, he had nipple tassels on hidden by the fans.

Well, I had me a boy, turned him into a man
I showed him all the things that he didn't understand
Whoa, and then I let him go

He teased at the audience, winked at them as he pulled the fans back enough to let the silk drop a little, giving them a glimpse enough to see that he was wearing something different to usual.

Now, there's one in California who's been cursing my name
'Cause I found me a better lover in the UK

Hey, hey, until I made my getaway

A few cheers and whoops went up in the audience and Will grinned. All the more so as he looked out over the audience and immediately saw Hannibal Lecter.

The stage lights wouldn't allow him to make out the expression on the man's face, but he leaned forward a little in his chair as though engrossed. It sent a warm feeling through Will's chest.

One, two, three, they gonna run back to me
'Cause I'm the best baby that they never gotta keep
One, two, three, they gonna run back to me
They always wanna come, but they never wanna leave

As he strode to the other end of the stage, he flicked both fans out and turned. Sending them fluttering around him and then cascading in front of him as he came to a stop centre stage.

Ex's and the oh, oh, oh's they haunt me
Like ghosts they want me to make 'em all
They won't let go
Ex's and oh's

He was facing the audience and teasing them with movements of the fans, never quite enough to reveal what he was wearing.

As the music continued so did Will, alternating moves as he'd rehearsed. Each time giving the audience more of a glimpse, more of a reveal.

The audience were clapping and whooping, cheering him on with encouragement to reveal himself entirely.

Will wanted to laugh. It was so fun, such a different way of performing than he usually did. Drawing on his boylesque training in a way he rarely had before.

One, two, three, they gonna run back to me
'Cause I'm the best baby that they never gotta keep

On the beat, Will moved one fan away, fluttering it out to the side as the other covered him completely.

One, two, three, they gonna run back to me
They always wanna come, but they never wanna leave

He repeated the action, swapping so that his other hand went out and the other fan covered him. Much to the good natured groans in the audience, who were clearly enjoying the tease.

Will turned his back to the audience.

Ex's and the oh, oh, oh's they haunt me
Like ghosts they want me to make 'em all

They won't let go

Will arched his back a little as he raised his arms above his head and began to expertly turn and twist the fans. Creating beautiful shapes with the water-like silk to the ahs and ohs of the audience.

My ex's and the oh, oh, oh's they haunt me
Like ghosts they want me to make 'em all
They won't let go
Ex's and oh's

Will turned back to them and repeated his peek-a-boo non-reveal, geeing them up all the more until finally.

One, two, three, they gonna run back to me
Climbing over mountains and a-sailing over seas
One, two, three, they gonna run back to me
They always wanna come, but they never wanna leave

Will flung his arms out to his sides, deafened by the cheers from the audience as he revealed the costume underneath, isolating his core to twirl the tassels.

They won't let go
Ex's and the oh, oh, oh's they haunt me
Like ghosts they want me to make 'em all

He continued to move the fans, no longer trying to hide himself but just frame his body for the audience to drink in at their leisure.

They won't let go
Ex's and oh's

The audience were on their feet the moment the song ended, clapping and cheering as Will tried to catch his breath. He was grinning as he took a bow before leaving the stage.

Bev was already waiting there, grinning from ear to ear herself.

“Holy fuck baby.” She made a chef’s kiss motion, “Don’t get me wrong, I love your aerial work, but you need to do this more often. I bet your tip jar is rammed.”

Will was still riding the high of the performance, catching his breath as he walked backstage with Bev and towards the dressing room.

“You wanted a chat?” Bev asked casually, though he could see the slight concern there, she was always worrying about something. Came with the business of business.

Will was quick to put her out of her misery.

“I need to freshen up, get changed. But could you… I’d like you to set up a room for a private dance. And ask my admirer to join me.”

Bev's grin grew wider.

*

"Could you come with me please, sir?" The waitress appeared at Hannibal's table just as the MC was warming up the audience for the final act. Given that there was one more act to go, the interruption caught Hannibal by surprise.

When he looked up in question, she flashed him a wide grin and said, "Silk has granted your request for a private dance."

She'd leaned in to say it though had to speak up over the chattering crowd and the dying applause. Enough that a few people nearby overheard and couldn't help but turn in surprise to look at Hannibal.

He ignored the glances, merely giving the waitress a nod, as he stood and collected his jacket from the back of the chair.

Hannibal followed her to the side of the room and then along the darkened wall to the side door next to the stage. His palms were sweaty and he found, now that he was in this position, he had no idea how to behave. How to act, what to say. Not least because the exchange of notes between them had allowed some getting to know each other and now a dance felt both impersonal and overly personal. Not that he would turn it down. But perhaps they could use the time to talk instead?

Hannibal swallowed and followed as the waitress lead the way.

"Just in here, Silk will be a short while. Can I get a drink whilst you're waiting?"

Hannibal blinked and looked at her for a long moment, saw the amusement dancing in her eyes. How starstruck he must look.

"Yes, a glass of-"

"Your usual," She winked and opened the door they had come to stand in front of. "You can pay for the drink and the dance after. Harvey will take care of that with you." She nodded to the bouncer stood just inside the door and then turned and left.

The bouncer ushered him in and pointed at the plush sofa built into the side of the wall. Hannibal nodded and took a seat, the bouncer remaining on the other side of a curtain that hung between the room and the door.

The room was circular and small, a square room made to look circular by hanging drapes, an aesthetic helped by the dim lighting. It all had a very sensual feel.

In the very centre of the room was a pole, but nothing other than that and the long sofa Hannibal sat on, which could likely accommodate three, and the small table next to it on which sat a coaster.

He busied his mind with such thoughts as he waited for Silk to arrive. But the next knock came from the door he had entered through and the waitress came in, deposited his drink with a smile, and left again. The bouncer closed the curtain then, leaving Hannibal alone in the circular space.

Hannibal took a sip and set it back down on the table before turning back to the room.

He hadn't heard the swiff of the curtain at the other end of the room, but when he sat back in the sofa, there was Silk.

The boy stopped, like a deer in the headlights as he stood there across the small room. Hannibal wondered if he wore a similar expression. Silk wore only a pair of white shorts, short and sparkly as he often did. No harness, no other coverings to hide his perfectly sculpted body. The nipple tassels gone, in their place a faint red mark from where they had been stuck on.

Silk moved to the pole, breaking eye contact and swinging himself up on it as soft music began.

This close he was even more beautiful than Hannibal had imagined. Elfin features, strong limbs. He realised that none of his sketches had done the boy justice at all. The way his muscles moved as he held the pole was something Hannibal could study at length.

The instrumental music ended and Silk dismounted the pole and came towards him, the boy exuded such strength and poise in how he moved. Something Hannibal realised he had enjoyed when watching him - even taken some strength from to get him through his long days of surgery.

"What would you like?" Silk asked quietly. Not quite timid but not suggestive either. It spoke of the lack of experience, and Hannibal felt a sudden rush of exhilaration at being the only person who Silk had danced privately for.

"I…" Hannibal drifted, caught in the boy's eyes again. He licked his lips and swallowed.

He wanted to say that he wanted to talk. That now he had this chance, all he wanted was five minutes alone to talk with the person he had been exchanging notes with. Not the performer on stage.

"A pole dance?" Silk asked before adding much more quietly, and this time a little uncertainty, "a lap dance?"

Hannibal let out a shuddering breath.

"Just to… to talk…" Hannibal said.

There was a cough from behind the curtain, and Silk shook his head with a slight smile. Clearly, it was a dance or nothing. Those were the rules.

"I'll decide," Silk broke the silence, the words coming out little more than a whisper.

Silk cleared his throat and music started up, this time a song.

[I Feel You – Depeche Mode]

Silk drew in a breath and closed his eyes, as though letting the music flow through him as the beat began.

I feel you
Your sun it shines

Silk stalked forward, and Hannibal's breath caught in his chest at the sight.

I feel you
Within my mind

He swayed in front of Hannibal, running hands over his body and writhing.

You take me there
You take me where
The kingdom comes
You take me to

Silk lowered himself to a crouch, almost as though he was going to get on his knees in front of Hannibal. It was overwhelming. The thought was both perfect and so wrong. He didn't just want this.

And lead me through Babylon
This is the morning of our love
It's just the dawning of our love

Silk lowered his head and then whipped it back, his hair bouncing as he took hold of Hannibal's thighs and pushed himself to standing. Looming over him.

I feel you
Your heart, it sings

Silk lowered himself, his mouth ghosting so close to Hannibal's that he must have felt the sharp breath Hannibal took. He lowered himself to his knees, either side of Hannibal, and held himself there above his lap.

I feel you
The joy it brings
Where heaven waits there's golden gates
And back again

Silk looked directly into his eyes. Intense, and strangely it seemed like something the boy rarely did. On stage that was certainly true, but now Hannibal was pinned by his gaze. Silk began to undulate his hips, his body barely touching Hannibal's but enough to make him hard. So painfully hard.

You take me to
And lead me through oblivion

For a moment Silk leaned forward, lowering his eyes a little but not enough to break contact, as he alternated the move, now undulating his upper body against Hannibal's.

This is the morning of our love
It's just the dawning of our love
I feel you precious soul
And I am whole

Every move perfectly in rhythm with the song, Silk moved back to his barely there grinding against Hannibal's lap. His hair falling into his eyes a little.

Hannibal couldn't help but reach up to smooth it back, gently tucking it behind Silk's ear.

I feel you, your rising sun
My kingdom comes

Silk let out a shuddering breath and stilled completely, looking directly into Hannibal's eyes.

God, it felt like there was a connection there. Something more than just the imaginings of a surgeon who should know better and not act like a teenage fool.

Silk swallowed, "No… no touching," the words were barely more than a whisper, barely audible over the music. "It's not allowed. You'll be banned."

Each breath you take
Where angels sing spread their wings
My love's on high
You take me home to glory's throne
By and by

Hannibal nodded, having lost himself in the moment. He knew the rules well enough from when he'd enquired before.

Silk began to move again, this time lowering himself a fraction to grind against Hannibal's hard cock.

He bit back a groan, but couldn't hold back the whimper as he felt Silk's hardness against his own.

The rules. No coming.

He tried to remind himself, given how insanely close he was.

This is the morning of our love
It's just the dawning of our love
This is the morning of our love
It's just the dawning of our love

And he hardly even cared as Silk practically rode him, until he thought the boy might come. And by god how he wanted that. How he wanted to see Silk come apart with pleasure.

The music became an instrumental outro and then it was over.

The music stopped and Silk breathed heavily in his lap. Both of them still hard and wanting.

Silk's hands slipped from their purchase on the sofa behind him and down to his shoulders. For one moment Hannibal thought the boy was going to slip his arms around his neck, but instead he just used him for support as he climbed from Hannibal's lap.

The instrumental background music came back on and Silk looked for a moment like he was about to cut and run, tenting his tight shorts as he was.

But instead he leaned in and spoke quietly.

"I'm sorry, I took that a little far. I wanted to… I wanted to thank you. For everything."

As Silk stood to walk away, Hannibal got to his feet and reached for him. Not to grab Silk, just enough to get his attention by stroking his hand down the boy's arm.

Silk turned and looked at him. He suddenly looked very vulnerable, and Hannibal wasn't sure why. What he'd done to make him feel that way. So all he did was nod his acknowledgement and intend to let the boy go.

"Can I… before you go. Can I tell you how beautiful you are?" Hannibal found the words spilling out and heard another throat clearing from behind the curtain.

That at least brought a slight smile to Silk's face and he replied quietly, though loud enough for his protector to hear, "You already told me in your notes, shown me in art. But it's nice to hear it in person."

Hannibal blew out a relieved breath but knew this was borrowed time. No fraternisation.

"If I didn't think I might get banned or worse," Hannibal smiled as he indicated towards the curtain, "I'd tell you that I'd love to draw you sometime. Have you pose for me so that I don't have to try and capture perfection just from memory."

Silk blushed at that, the blush he had imagined many times.

It took a moment for the boy to compose himself and very quickly the hard exterior returned. The one that seemed so aloof on stage, so unreachable. Sometimes even angry or rageful.

Even so Silk replied, "Thank you," and started back across the room. He stood next to the curtain he was about to disappear back through before he turned to Hannibal again, looking at him very seriously as he said. "I mean it. Actually it… it means a lot. Coming from you. From someone who has seen me when I've been," Silk shook his head, trying to find the words. "Practically disfigured. It means a lot. Thank you Doctor Lecter."

The curtain twitched and Silk was gone.

But Hannibal stood there stunned. Eyes wide, he stared at an after image of Silk. Not Silk. Will Graham. A patient whose name he had never forgotten.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

A misstep into getting to know each other.

Hannibal sat in the private dance room, Silk - Will - dancing around and around on the pole, as if possessed. His feet were bleeding and Hannibal wanted him to stop, but he couldn't utter a word.

He looked down to realise tight arms circled his chest, stopping his breath.

Hannibal wasn't sat on a chair but upon the antlered man, who seemed to stretch and loom above and over him as he squeezed the life from him. Forcing him to watch Will dance over and over. There was money at Will's feet, being thrown from somewhere, everywhere and nowhere. As he danced the notes grew sodden with the blood from his feet.

Hannibal could hear his own softly muttered words, compliments that he had thought when watching Will on stage, before stuffing his jar full of money.

The money now at his feet.

He tried to break away from the antlered man's clutches. Finally he could breath, just a gasp, but enough to scream.

"Stop, you monster!" Hannibal screamed the words, realising at the same moment, he was screaming them at himself.

*

Hannibal woke in a cold sweat, sitting bolt upright in bed as he tried to catch his breath.

His chest was tight with pain and the nightmare rolled over and over in his mind. Will danced and danced.

He grit his teeth and balled his fist before bringing it down on the bed next to him.

He felt nauseous. As he had all the evening before, all the way home from the club and then as he prepared for bed and lay there awake until exhaustion claimed him.

His stomach rumbled with a need for breakfast, but the thought of eating repulsed him. His behaviour repulsed him.

Hannibal put his head in his hands as he tried to catch his breath, tried not to give into the sting of tears at the corner of his eyes.

What had he expected? He had made himself believe that giving a dancer ridiculous amounts of money was acceptable. That it was just a reflection of the joy he brought to Hannibal, when in fact it was surely creepy and weird. He hadn't recognised his own behaviour and that made him feel all the angrier.

Had Will only agreed to the private dance because he felt he owed him. For the money? For the healthcare?

"I wanted to… I wanted to thank you. For everything."

An anguished sound escaped from Hannibal's throat.

How could he have done that? How could he have made Will feel that way? And even if the man had not been Will Graham, he didn't know his history, and how Hannibal's attentions might have been perceived. Would he even recognised his terrible behaviour had it not been Will?

Though Will being a former patient made this all the worse, it shouldn't matter. He shouldn't have to have been a patient for Hannibal to have realised his behaviour wasn't acceptable.

Hannibal considered going back to the club to apologise, or at the least send a note of apology. After everything the boy had gone through with his ex, Hannibal resolved he would do neither. He would disappear and let Will Graham live his life without the intrusion of a doctor who should know better.

*

"What's eating you, kiddo?" Barney asked.

It was mid afternoon on one of the few days Will still pulled a shift at the auto shop. They'd hired a new kid, and so most of the time he was just there to help them keep on top of things. He made enough money from dancing so it wasn't so much that, but Will hadn't refused the few hours work here and there, knowing that Jack was using it as the reason he insisted Will still stay in the apartment.

And the truth was, he'd miss it. The work, the people. It gave him an outlet that grounded him after the hyper reality of being on stage. Besides which, Barney and the Crawfords were family, they still regularly had a Sunday brunch together. This was a nice way to make sure he got to see them, and times like now, he was really grateful for that.

Will let out a sigh and looked up from the engine he was working on. Barney was sipping at the coffee he'd just stopped to make for them both. Will grabbed a rag and rubbed some of the grease and oil from his hands before taking a proffered mug.

He took a sip as Barney waited expectantly.

“I… did a private dance last month.” Will started, unsure where to even start with the whole thing. It had been playing on his mind more and more. In fact, it played on his mind with each new show and not seeing Hannibal Lecter back in the audience.

“Yeah?” Barney frowned. No judgement there, but they’d discussed this before - Will explaining to Barney and the Crawfords how the club worked, and that he only need go as far as he wanted. There was no pressure. “You okay with that? You say it was last month. You haven’t done one since? Was everything okay?” He could feel the concern and protectiveness radiating from the man.

“It was fine, no need for concern, just…” Will sighed again, “It was a… special circumstance. This guy he’s been watching my shows for a while. Tips big and he wanted a dance. So…” Will trailed off, trying to think how to word the rest.

“So you felt obligated?” Barney replied with a frown.

“No. Not really. Not over the tips. I mean,” Will shook his head and smiled. “We have a name backstage for big tippers. We call them ‘chumps’.”

Barney let out a booming laugh and then grinned, “Well, for sure.”

“There’s never any obligation or expectation on the dancers, and if anyone tips big thinking there is, then that’s on them.” Will continued with a shrug.

“Chumps,” Barney agreed with a nod.

“But this guy. It was Doctor Lecter.”

Barney cocked his head, and then his eyes went wide as he placed the name. He never met the man, but Will and the Crawfords spoke about him more than once at that time.

“Oh. Well, okay. That’s… So you felt obligated because of… everything back then?” Barney asked tentatively.

Will could feel the protective anger coming off of the man, and his heart swelled from it.

Will drew in a breath and shrugged, “I don’t know? Maybe? It’s all kind of a blur now. But at the time it seemed to make sense. That he *wanted* me to thank him. And I figured I should. But after… We talked for a minute and I… I don’t think he knew who I was.”

Barney gave him a questioning look and then nodded, like he was remembering how knocked about Will had been when the doctor had seen him.

Will shrugged. “I didn’t even realise until I was leaving the room, I looked back and saw his expression. He looked… sort of horrified. And he hasn’t been back since.”

“You think you did something wrong?” Barney guessed.

Will shrugged again and slumped against the side of the car he was working on. “I just keep thinking about it more and more. He doesn’t come back to the shows any more and… *did* I

do something wrong?"

"No, son. Don't ever think that. You know as well as anyone should that you can't be held accountable for other people's thoughts and actions like that. I suspect he was just surprised to realise he already knew you. How he's reacted to that is on him. And if he never comes back, he never comes back. Okay? You didn't do anything wrong."

Barney stepped forward and put a reassuring hand on Will's shoulder, giving it a squeeze.

Will nodded and managed a lopsided smile. "Sure, okay. Yeah, you're right."

Barney nodded and stepped away, putting his coffee mug on the side to go back to the car he was working on.

"Unless of course," Barney gave Will a knowing look and a fond grin, "you want him to come back."

Will grumbled even as his cheeks heated.

*

An accident on the main road forced Hannibal to take the route passed the auto shop that Mrs Komeda had recommended to him when he'd needed an unexpected oil change, quite some time back. Hannibal of course remembered the place as he drove by. He looked over it as he moved steadily along, and it looked much the same.

Except for one thing.

Will Graham.

Quite impossibly, Will Graham was stood on the small forecourt making hand signals as the man he'd previously dealt with, Barney he recalled, backed an old Buick out of the workshop and onto the forecourt.

Will was wearing dirty coveralls, open at his throat. His shoulder length hair was tied back loosely behind his head, a few tendrils hanging into his face, a face smudged with oil.

Hannibal felt his heart skip a beat for more than one reason.

He hadn't been back to the club since the private dance, resolving that he really shouldn't. That he should remove himself from Will's life. As difficult as that had been.

But the other reason he was so struck in that moment, was the strangeness of it. As though this was a different reality, one in which Will was an auto mechanic - as he had originally believed the boy to be - and not a dancer.

For a brief moment he entertained the thought that he had completely mistaken Silk and he wasn't Will Graham at all. But that thought was easily dismissed, even before he saw the way Will then practically skipped back across the forecourt. Happy and blithe, his movement fluid and musical even in the silence.

Hannibal turned back to the road and carried on driving before he could cause an accident of his own.

But he didn't miss it. In that moment before he turned away, the glance out over the street and Will seeing him. An instant recognition and a mixture of hope and disappointment on his face

*

It was days before Hannibal did anything but work and sleep. Endless emergencies and short staffing meant that there were a few times when he wasn't even up to leaving the hospital, sleeping where he could.

It was a late afternoon towards the end of the week that Hannibal started home and realised he was, unnecessarily, driving past the auto shop. His mind seeking out Will before he even realised it.

And there he was in the fading light, inside the shop, illuminated by the glow of a torch he had on inside the engine.

He was beautiful, of course. Even in coveralls and oil, he was just as beautiful as when he was barely dressed on the stage. Hannibal's heart ached to see him as he drove by.

And, he had to admit, he wasn't entirely in control of himself - fatigued and guilt ridden - when he got to the end of the street and pulled his car around. His heart was thumping and he knew he should drive on, keep going. But instead he pulled his Bentley onto the forecourt and stopped his engine.

He looked over and saw Will look up in confusion, before taking a breath and opening the door. By the time he got out, Will had taken the few steps from the workshop out onto the forecourt.

"Hello, Will."

"Doctor Lecter," Will greeted, a harsh edge to his tone that Hannibal was sure he had earned.

He was wiping his hands in a dirty cloth and Hannibal found the action as mesmerising as everything else he'd ever seen Will Graham do. Seen Silk do.

"I need to apologise," Hannibal breathed out the words, knowing he had to now that he was face to face with him. Wanting to as well, whilst not wanting to distress Will. It felt more possible here, outside of the club, it felt real.

Will quirked a brow, "For getting what you wanted and then never coming back?"

"What?" Hannibal paled. Had his actions been perceived that way? He shook his head, and cursed himself for a fool. "Apparently, I have several things to apologise for. I… I would apologise for my ambush, but I know I will soon be apologising again and you'll tire of that eventually, so I perhaps I should consider using apologies sparingly."

Will had a stern look on his face, but his lips twitched slightly. For a moment Hannibal was sure a smile would emerge and then Will replied, “Just keep it professional.”

It took Hannibal a moment to realise the tease in the gruff tone, another flicker of a little smile.

“Or we could socialise, like adults.” Hannibal rejoined, stepping a little closer without even meaning to. “God forbid we become friendly.”

“I don't find you that interesting.” Will teased again. Hannibal couldn’t help the swell of his heart and he moved forward another half step, hopeful.

“You will.”

“Overconfident, doctor.”

Will broke into a grin and for a moment Hannibal was sure that they were going to close the space between them one way or another.

But then an older man emerged from the workshop looking at them curiously. Hannibal noticed him first and knew it to be the man who had taken delivery of his car for the oil change some months earlier, Barney. He gave Hannibal a polite nod and then froze, his eyes flicking between them with curiosity.

It was apparently clear that Hannibal wasn't there on business. He suspected how close they were standing gave that away.

"Say, Will." The man called out and Will turned to look at him, "This the chump?" Some recognition there, as though the man were adding up more puzzle pieces than Hannibal was privy to.

Even from the side on view, Hannibal could see the flush of red up Will's throat and to the tips of his ears before he gave a curt and dismissive nod.

The man walked back into the workshop, chuckling as he went.

When Will turned back to him, Hannibal cocked a brow. "I wonder if I should ask?"

"Are you easily offended?" Will asked, the tease back in his tone, which warmed Hannibal with renewed hope.

"Not that I'm aware of, though I find myself particularly susceptible to unexpected emotions around you," Hannibal admitted without thought, his words causing a renewal of heat in Will's cheeks.

Will cleared his throat, composure - not that it had been terribly lacking - firmly back in place and he took a small step back. "I explained to Barney that we call big tippers chumps. It's… not personal. It just…"

As Will trailed off Hannibal took a deep breath, "Another thing I was going to apologise for. It was… wrong of me to tip you the way I did. To make you feel obligated. It was never my intention to do more than show my appreciation in the only way I-"

Will's laughter cut him off.

It was a glorious sound, despite the mocking note to it. "Doctor Lecter, I never felt… Well not because of the money. The reason we call high tippers chumps is because they sometimes think it buys them some sort of favour that it really doesn't. And security would act quickly on anyone who tried to take advantage of the tips they put in." Will shook his head dismissively as he continued to chuckle. “Fact is, some people think we’re being taken advantage of, whoring ourselves in some way. But really, it’s the audience that is taken advantage of, we want to be there, and no one is forcing anyone to watch or to tip.”

Hannibal was relieved to know this, but he marked Will's words, "The money didn't obligate you. But you felt obligated all the same." He said, not a question.

Will's laughter died and he looked down at his feet before letting out a deep sigh.

"I… thought that you knew who I was and wanted me to… feel obligated. For everything you did for me. Back then."

Hannibal's heart ached at how quietly will's words came out. It ached all the more to know Will thought this of him.

Hannibal tentatively reached forward and placed a gentle hand on Will's arm, fighting his uncharacteristic urge for touch, and stopping at just that and not taking Will's hand. Even then he felt that he might be crossing a line, given what he knew of Will's history.

"I understand that you know little of me, Will. But please know that I would never have anyone feel obligated to me."

Will nodded and placed his hand gently over Hannibal's. "I realised it might not have been your intent when I left the room." He raised his eyes to Hannibal's, "I realised you didn't recognise me at all."

Hannibal shook his head, "You felt familiar, and I wanted to make your acquaintance, to see if it was just a case of being star struck. I never had much time for mooning over movie stars when I was a young man, so I believed I was reliving my youth. I wanted it to be more, and then when I realised…"

"You ran away." Will didn't remove his hand, but his tone turned hard, he frowned. "It's okay, you thought I was something I wasn't. You wanted Silk and realised I was just Will, damaged and-"

Hannibal's heart thumped in his chest as he surged forward and stopped Will's mouth with a kiss.

It was a little more than chaste. Gentle and soft, and not demanding. For a brief moment Will kissed him back.

But then hands drew up to his chest and gently pushed him back. Hannibal immediately realised his mistake. Yet another in catalogue of errors in how to treat Will Graham.

"I apologise," Hannibal said hurriedly, "I shouldn't ha-"

Will's chuckle cut him off. "You really are going to keep needing to apologise, aren't you?" Will stepped into the space between them and snaked a hand up around the back of Hannibal's neck. He played his fingers there, leaving Hannibal trembling as he pulled them closer.

"Never stop me from talking like that again, it's rude." Will practically purred the words before pressing his mouth to Hannibal's. He kissed Hannibal's mouth open until their tongues met. It was perfect, and Hannibal wanted more.

His hands gently rested on Will's hips for a brief moment before Will pulled away entirely, one final nipping kiss, before he was out of reach.

"I need to get back to work. Please don't avoid me." Will started back to the workshop before turning and saying, "See you at the club."

*

“Yup,” Bev told Will with a wink without Will having to ask. She grinned at him but he only scowled back, trying to hide his elation at Hannibal being back in the audience.

Will was trying so hard not to be completely obvious about his feelings. The fact that he had enjoyed Hannibal’s notes, been flattered by his drawings. And was certainly attracted to the man, something he’d tried to avoid until his lapdance made it obvious to them both. And now knowing that Hannibal hadn’t intended any obligation and hadn’t even realised who he was, left him free to indulge these thoughts and feelings without questioning them. As much as that was possible.

He’d told Bev that they had run into each other and that Hannibal had felt bad about being a *chump*. They’d talked and he said he’d come back again. That was as much as he’d told her, despite her knowing looks. And that had been three days ago.

He knew better than to automatically believe that Hannibal wasn’t coming back, as much as his mind and, if he had to admit it, heart, tried to convince him otherwise. He had to believe that not everyone was terrible. And Hannibal Lecter was a doctor, he was bound to be busy and have crazy long hours. Will knew not to expect him immediately, as much as he tried not to let it gnaw at him.

The same amount he now tried not to let the excitement get to him.

“Pretender,” Will said quickly before Bev could leave.

“Uhuh,” Bev nodded and chuckled, apparently completely unphased by his last minute change of routine choice… To one that she knew Will had been working on with one thing in mind - teasing his admirer like the little asshole he could be.

There was no point in his trying to deny to himself that he hadn’t created the routine without his admirer in mind. He’d been working on it since before the lapdance, and then all the more after.

Will looked at his make up in the mirror, it would be fine. But his clothes? He quickly pulled everything off and got into the costume on his rack that he’d been working on for this routine. It was a little unfinished here and there, but it would be okay for now he was sure.

It was an almost sheer black bodysuit accented with glittery silver accents. Underneath he wore a tiny black posing pouch and no pasties. Under the right light he’d look almost naked. Will’s hands shook with excitement as he pulled it on.

By the time he was in the wings and his music was queued, he felt like he might burst out of his skin and he was so grateful for the change from a sedate, if ethereal silks routine, to this high energy boylesque number. The silks were down, red rather than the black he would have had if not for the last minute change, but he’d make do. He would dance with and around them, use them and pull himself up a little, but it would be mostly stagework.

[The Pretender - Foo Fighters]

Keep you in the dark
You know they all pretend
Keep you in the dark
And so it all began

The music started slowly and then at the picked up beat Will leapt onto the stage. Literally.

Send in your skeletons
Sing as their bones go marching in, again
The need you buried deep
The secrets that you keep are ever ready
Are you ready?

After he’d sprang from the wings immediately into a forward roll to the centre of the stage, he sprung back up and took hold of the silks.

The wheel is spinning me
It's never-ending, never-ending

He played in the silks, pulling himself over in somersaults just above the stage, moving back and forth, running forward and letting the silks lift him back. Then he gripped them tight and ran to the side of the stage...

Same old story
What if I say I'm not like the others?

What if I say I'm not just another one of your plays?
You're the pretender
What if I say I will never surrender?

Will lifted, letting the momentum carry him as he used the silks to practically fly around the stage, his legs positioned in a midair splits.

As the song continued he touched back down, ran to the other side and repeated the position. The silks were long enough to almost give the illusion of flying over the audience, though really he was far from the edge of the stage.

In time our soul untold
I'm just another soul for sale, oh well

Chest heaving from exertion, he set his feet back to centre stage and released the silks, letting them drape over his shoulders as he stalked seductively towards the audience.

He blew them kisses and winked, to their roaring cheers.

The next part involved more aerial work, a few fancy moves he'd been working on. With cheers, he turned and grabbed the silks again, lifting up.

The page is out of print
We are not permanent
We're temporary, temporary
Same old story

Will felt the rip rather than heard it over the pounding music. His face obscured enough by the silks, to hide his wince. The inner seam along his leg had given out, just around the crotch. And that would teach him, he supposed, for going on in an unfinished costume.

What if I say I'm not like the others?
What if I say I'm not just another one of your plays?
You're the pretender
What if I say that I'll never surrender?

There was no way he could hide it. No way it wouldn't get worse with each movement.

Thinking quickly and knowing there was no choice but to improvise, Will turned over and over in the silks and back down to the ground, landing on the stage in what he could only describe as a superhero pose.

There were whoops and hollers and Will wasn't sure that anyone had noticed yet, which was probably for the better. The beat slowed.

I'm the voice inside your head
You refuse to hear

Will started to slowly stand, taking hold of the front collar of the bodysuit.

I'm the face that you have to face
Mirrored in your stare
I'm what's left, I'm what's right
I'm the enemy

He ripped it.

I'm the hand that will take you down
Bring you to your knees
So who are you?

The audience started practically screaming with cheers as he started to rip the cloth from his own body. Tearing it in a frenzy as the music began to peak again.

What if I say I'm not like the others?
What if I say I'm not just another one of your plays?
You're the pretender

The music thundered through his veins as he went to the edge of the stage in his tattered rags, leaning down to run a hand up his leg before going back down and ripping from the ankle up.

What if I say I will never surrender?
What if I say I'm not like the others?
What if I say I'm not just another one of your plays?
You're the pretender

He continued tearing and shredding until it was just remnants clinging to his almost naked body.

What if I say that I'll never surrender?
What if I say I'm not like the others?

He looked out to the audience, gazing over and above them as he always did, as he pulled the last of the fabric and it came away from his body, leaving him in just a sheen of sweat and the black thong.

So who are you?
Yeah, who are you?
Yeah, who are you?

The audience roared, a few stood to applaud. And then Will saw him, Hannibal Lecter's eyes were red in the light. Shining with something that Will wanted to experience up close. Lust and possessiveness but not like Matt, this was something good and wonderful. It came from deep from the heart of a man he found that he trusted would never hurt him.

The music stopped and he was trembling. It took everything in him to break the gaze.

He turned to walk off the stage, a few whistles at his mostly exposed ass. He couldn't help but stop and look back over his shoulder and give it a playful smack before continuing.

Will came off the stage panting, the crowd almost deafening.

“I was *not* expecting *that*!” Bev told him, stunned where she stood in the wings. Her eyes wide and her grin mischievous.

“Costume malfunction,” Will explained, handing her the remnants of said costume, “I had to improvise.”

“I’ll say,” She winked and slapped his ass as he walked passed.

*

Will had asked for one of the wait staff to bring Hannibal a private dance room.

He shook a little with the nerves but he wasn’t about to lose this opportunity in case the doctor disappeared again.

She let Hannibal in and he felt the doctor’s hesitation before he pulled the curtain back enough to enter the main room. Will stood there in little more than the costume he’d had on stage. He’d changed the posing pouch to his usual gogo shorts, and was wearing a short silk robe over the top.

“No security,” Hannibal noted as he entered cautiously.

Will could feel it, feel the concern Hannibal had. It came off him in waves, or perhaps Will was just especially attuned to him? He was worried that he was going to do something that would scare Will away. Which might have been a great many things years ago, but now?

“No fee either. I mean… I want to spend time with you privately. This is how you managed it with me, does it work this way around too?” There was both sarcasm and tease in his voice. A sassiness that he knew came across in his performances and that Will needed Hannibal to know was part of him. He wasn’t the damaged, frightened Will Graham who he’d met in the hospital. He was Silk, he really was. He was the Will Graham that was Silk.

“I find I can’t really deny you anything. I’m a fly to your spider. You’ve lured me in.” Hannibal said gently. Will wanted to roll his eyes at the way he spoke, so pretentious. And yet, from him, Will liked it. He liked that he was saying such florid, beautiful things to him.

Will couldn’t help a grin at the idea of lures. He still made them occasionally on his lunch break at the auto shop, more as a relaxation these days than to sell.

“More a fisherman really.” Will chuckled. “You’re on the hook.”

Hannibal frowned and continued into the room, not quite getting his meaning.

“I like to fish,” Will clarified.

Hannibal smiled at that. A strange smile, one that seemed full of something like pride. A happiness at gleaning more about Will. Will realised the feeling would be more than mutual if he drew information from Hannibal in return.

“I’ve never been. I enjoyed hunting as a child. Or rather, I enjoyed the time with my father.” Hannibal had closed the space between them and despite the turn of the conversation, it was impossible not to feel the spark of energy that crackled between them.

Hannibal reached out and stroked some of Will’s hair from his face, tucking it behind his ear. “I know so much about you, Will Graham. Things you might not ever have wanted someone to know. How can I balance that?”

Will frowned and cocked his head.

“It seems only right that I share my trauma, the way you had no choice in sharing yours.” Hannibal continued.

Will shook his head, “No. No, Hannibal I don’t. I don’t need that. You don’t have to do that. If there are things you want to tell me in time, then...” Will trailed off.

“I’ve overstepped again,” Hannibal acknowledged, the slightest frown passed over his face before it evened out again.

Will shook his head again, “No, I just don’t want you to feel like have to. We have time, don’t we? To get to know each other?” Will found the words coming out hopeful. He wanted to see this man again and not just in the private dance room.

Hannibal nodded, a gentle smile spreading across his face. He cupped Will’s cheek.

“You’re so… Let me tell you then that I… struggle with seeing people abused. My sister, I had to take her out of such a situation. So I have no tolerance, and as a result I may have overstepped with you before, in the hospital.”

Will noted that he didn’t say he’d rescued his sister, which strangely relieved him. He didn’t want to be anyone’s rescue project. But he did need to be clear.

“You didn’t overstep. But, that wasn’t me. I need you to understand that Hannibal. If that’s who you want. That broken boy who lost himself inside someone else. That isn’t who I really am. It never was, I just got… hidden for a while. Until I was able to evolve, to become who I am now. Who I was always meant to be.”

“That’s not what I want.” Hannibal replied quickly. “I want the… I want the sweet and strong young man I met in the hospital, I want the sensual and courageous performer I see on stage.” He grinned, “I want the sassy grease monkey that blushes even as he puts me in my place. I want to know every part of you, Wi-”

Before Hannibal could finish, Will paid him back for cutting him off before.

He leaned in and kissed him. Deep and passionate, gradually pushing him back until Hannibal had no choice but to drop onto the sofa.

Will followed him down and straddled him, starting to grind against him.

“Wait,” Hannibal broke the kiss, pushing Will back enough to speak. “I don’t just want…”

“What do you want Hannibal?” Will asked, breathless and more desperate than he wanted to admit.

“I want this to be real. I want to go on a date, have dinner. I don’t want to come in my pants in the backroom of a cabaret club.”

Will chuckled, “We can do both.”

He swallowed Hannibal’s protest into another kiss. Hannibal grunted and without further words, Will started to rock his hips against Hannibal’s again.

They were both hard within moments, Will’s hands running up into Hannibal’s hair, mussing it as he kissed, and undulated his body.

He could feel Hannibal moving against him, meeting his thrusts and groaning at the friction.

Hannibal’s hands were on his back, but as he increased the pace, they slid down. He took a tight hold of Will’s ass and began to rut them together, grinding Will against him. Using his body to find the friction he needed, that they both needed.

Their moans filled the room, panting and the noises of their kisses. They moved against each other, grinding and rutting. Their cocks pressed firmly to each other, having slotted into the perfect position even with the clothes between them.

Hannibal began to thrust all the more, his strong arms flexing as he moved Will against him, Will having to do barely any of the work. Which was for the best as he could feel his pleasure building, his whole body going pliant in anticipation of what was about to come.

“Oh, shit… Hannibal…” Will cried out and squeezed his eyes shut as he felt his whole body spark with pleasure. He went rigid and then limp, his orgasm tearing through him as he spurted into his shorts.

Will was all the more pliant with his climax, burying his face in Hannibal’s neck, as Hannibal rocked a few more times then stilled. His hips shuddered and he grunted a couple of times before he too relaxed against the soft cushions.

They were both panting, Will nuzzling against Hannibal’s neck, and Hannibal’s hands gently sliding under the silk of the robe and caressing his back.

Finally when they had caught their breath, Hannibal muttered, “I don’t think dinner is a possibility tonight. I didn’t have the forethought to bring a spare set of clothes.”

Will chuckled.

*

Will felt utterly blissed out, and not just from the orgasm.

The evening had been pretty perfect. And after more kisses and exchanging cell numbers, Hannibal left when the club was closing.

When Will returned to the dressing room, no one needed to note the fact that he was hiding his soiled clothes under his robe, to suspect what had taken place. There were knowing grins and winks, a couple of whoops.

Will hushed them all with a scowl and had a quick shower in the adjoining bathroom.

When he came back out, most of the other dancers had packed up. Bev sat talking with a few who were packing up or taking off their makeup. But when she saw him she rose and came over to him, grinning wider than any of them.

“Now, I’m only going to tell you this once, and I’m not firing you because I know that no money changed hands. But, Will Graham, as much as I love your hot little ass, never ever have sex in my club again. I am not getting closed down for your shenanigans.”

Will’s face and chest heated and she chuckled and him and shook her head.

“And by the way. You should see your damn tip jar! I left it at your station.” Bev winked at him and wandered back over to the other dancers.

She was right about the tip jar, it was packed full of fives and ones. A few bigger notes, but even more stuffed than usual. Will went through his usual practice of emptying it all out and counting it up, slipping it into an envelope to take to the bank. He was almost done emptying the jar when he saw a scrap of paper.

Will smiled, grabbing it out and unfolding it eagerly, expecting a little note from Hannibal.

~Will, you always were a beautiful dancer.

Will felt his blood run cold and he dropped the note onto the dresser, backing away from it so hard that he tripped over the chair he tried to get up from and ended up sprawled on the floor.

“Will!” Bev cried out and he could hear her running to him.

Then he couldn’t hear anything but the thumping of his heart, the pounding of blood in his ears.

He never realised he’d recognise Matthew Brown’s writing until he saw it.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

The memory of Matt Brown looms over Hannibal and Will's first date.

Chapter Notes

The wonderful Nephilia did art for this chapter, which you can find over on her twitter! and below in the text. Please do go give her some love on twitter :D

Also, sorry for the delay. I usually post on Thursday as that's my freelancing day, but now with the lockdown it's a childcare day, so I'm all over the place and keep not getting around to it. Better late than never?

“Want me to call someone?” Bev asked gently as she smoothed her hand up and down his back.

Will shook his head and took the cup of tea offered to him by Shadow. He took a sip and winced, but didn’t spit out.

“This isn’t tea,” Will said, trying not to cough at the unexpected burn in his throat.

Shadow grinned at him, “This is better.”

Will nodded and took another sip.

“I could call Barney?” Bev suggested, knowing enough about Will’s life outside the club to ask.

Will shook his head again, “No, it’s late. I don’t want him bothered.”

“I’ll drive you home.” Shadow offered, “I can stay over if you like? Or you can come stay with me and Sweeney? Whatever helps you feel safe.”

Will wanted to scoff but managed to pull on a grateful smile and a nod. “I’ll think about it. Give me a minute.” He wasn’t sure he’d ever feel safe again. Matt being in the club felt like a violation.

Will downed the rest of the drink and then let out a breath and a wince. “I’d appreciate the ride home. And… if you could stay.”

Shadow grasped his shoulder and gave it a firm squeeze, “Of course. Let me just call Sweeney and let him know.”

Shadow let himself out of the dressing room to make the call and Bev rubbed Will's back again.

“We can work something out with rides and, if you want someone to stay with you I can arrange one of the bouncers to do night shifts at your place. I’m just… Will, I’m so fucking sorry. I don’t know how-”

“It’s alright,” Will interrupted. “I always knew he’d find me.”

“Will,” Bev protested, but he shook his head.

“No, it’s fine. I… I’m fine.” He could do with more of the drink, but he really was. Or as fine as he could be as he started to pull himself back together. “I thought I’d be panicked and… I don’t know. I’m scared. I really am. But it’s not like before. I’m scared because I know what he’s capable of. It wasn’t like when I first got away from him, then I was scared that I’d…”

“That you'd never escape him. Or that you’d go back to him.” Bev finished.

Will blew out a breath and nodded.

“I’m not that person anymore. But I’m not stupid, I’m still scared of what he could do to me, to people I love. I don’t particularly want to be put in the hospital again.”

Bev nodded, “Okay, well. Let’s call the police. Shadow will wait for you. We’ll report his being here, get that flagged up with them. Give them the note. If they need you to make a statement, I can take you over to the station in the morning.”

Will let out another heavy sigh and nodded. “Yeah, sounds good.”

“And I’ll kick everyone’s ass and make sure they all fucking memorise his photo again.” Bev scowled.

Will managed a small smile at her anger, “It’s okay mama bear. They know what he looks like, I bet he…” Will shook his head. “He was probably wearing a hat or something. And, that picture is years old now.”

Will tried to sound accepting of it all even as he felt the fear stab through him like a dagger. He wanted to believe everything he was saying. And in a way he did, it just didn’t stop him from being scared.

*

A busy month had passed and one of the few things that had brightened Hannibal’s long and tiring days, was being in touch with Will.

They messaged almost every day, in fact increasingly so. Every message was bright and welcoming. And he flattered himself to think that perhaps his messages were a high point in

Will's days too.

Now he entered the club and took a seat towards the back of the room, signalling a waiter to bring his usual as he did so. Not his usual table as he hadn't arrived early enough, in fact it was the start of the second half of the show, and he'd been lucky to get one at all.

He'd completed his final shift in surgery and in a few weeks would be starting back at school as planned. Originally he'd invited Will for dinner this evening, and had been excited at the prospect of finally seeing him in person again after so many busy weeks.

But plans had changed.

Will wasn't meant to be working tonight, Ms Katz had asked him to fill in for a performer who was sick. He'd been so apologetic on the phone, but even so Hannibal had to wonder if it was Will hesitating. He understood Will's instinct to do that, after everything he'd been through and how long it had been since they'd seen each other.

But Hannibal had to admit to being relieved and reassured when Will had suggested they just meet up a few hours later and get drinks after the show rather than dinner as they had planned.

Hannibal felt his blood run hot in his veins as he remembered Will saying he didn't want to have to reschedule. He didn't want to have to wait to see him. His heart fluttered.

Hannibal's drink arrived and he took a sip as others began to refill the seats after the short interval. As Hannibal had anticipated, Will would perform last - allowing the audience to leave on the biggest high possible. He smiled to himself, laughing at himself really, at the pride he had taken in the thought that he was courting the man who so thrilled them all.

The performances were fantastic, but as the lights dimmed for the final act, Hannibal knew it wasn't just his bias that made him certain that Will's act would be the best of them all.

"Guys, gals and non-binary pals, it's time to welcome this evening's final act," The MC began, his tone soft. Soft enough that it cued the audience into the ambience of what was to come. "You have the money and he has the time, being pretty is his only crime. Please welcome to the stage, Silk…"

The lights went out completely, and then a very dim spotlight lit the side of the stage. The musical intro started, a warm and deep sound, and then Silk - Will - stepped a foot out from the wings. As Will came out, the spotlight increased in brightness, but still not full beam. Illuminating him almost like a streetlight.

Hannibal's breath caught in his throat.

Will was dressed in a black evening gown with droplets of red in it, almost like blood spatter. Hannibal couldn't tell if it was sequins or crystals, but they constantly caught the low light and sparkled as though wet.

Will had mentioned something more feminine to him before, recently in fact. Hannibal had replied that he would look beautiful in anything.

He wanted to support Will in expressing himself, including exploring a feminine side of himself, or purely feminisation. In fact, Hannibal found that even just these scant few meetings and the weeks of messages, Hannibal was willing to support Will in whatever he needed or wanted. His previous mentions of drag, and Will's natural inclination towards femininity meant that Hannibal didn't gasp, as many around him did. All the same, he was speechless at Will's beauty.

[Tomorrow We'll See – Sting]

Will stepped gracefully onto the stage as the musical intro started. The movement revealing both the split in the dress that ran high up his thigh, and the black and red lace panties, garter and stockings beneath.

The streets are wet
The lights have yet
To shed their tawdry lustre on the scene

Hannibal let out a shaky breath and tried to ignore the throb in his cock.

When Will looked out into the audience their gazes met for a brief second before Will looked away again, his hands running up his sides as he moved seductively across the stage. He seemed like a femme fatale in a noir movie. Hannibal swallowed.

But he'll slow down take a look
I've learned to read them just like books
And it's already half past ten
But they'll be back again

He moved like liquid across the stage. Slinking.

They say the first's the hardest trick
But after that it's just a matter of logic
They have the money I have the time
Being pretty's my only crime

Hannibal could hardly breath as Will moved slowly, deliberately. His hands drifting to the zip at the side of the dress.

Don't judge me
One more night I'll just have to take my chances
And tomorrow we'll see

There were likely cheers and whistles from the audience, Hannibal knew, but all he could hear was his blood pounding through his veins.

It felt like both his heart and lungs stopped working as the dress slid down, fully revealing the underwear and matching brassiere, one cut to fit his slim but masculine frame.

There was a cheer. There had to have been a cheer, but for Hannibal there was no one else in the room now. Just he and Will.

A friend of mine he wound up dead
His dress was stained the colour red
No next of kin no fixed abode
Another victim on this road

Will met his eyes again as he allowed the dress to slip down the length of his body, his hands following it in a gentle caress.

Hannibal let out a rather unseemly sound, and there was the briefest smirk across Will’s face. He wouldn’t have been able to hear him from so far back, but he had no doubt Will knew the effect he was having.

The police just carted him away
But someone took his place next day
He was home by thanksgiving
But not with the living

Will stepped out of the dress and crouched down, at first Hannibal thought to move the dress - which wasn't as graceful a move as he'd come to expect from Will. And whilst the dress was slipped out of the way, that clearly wasn't his goal. The fans had been.

Will stood back up with large black feather fans. They appeared to be stoned here and there with black and red crystals, enough to make them glint under the spotlight.

Don't judge me
You could be me in another life
In another set of circumstances

As Will rose, the fans whirled in time with the music. Slow and seductive.

Glimpses of the red lace panties and bra can be seen in flashes. Enough to mesmerise. And enough to just about see the brassiere come off when Will moved both fans to one hand.

Will held the fans up to his chin and let the bra dangle seductively over and in front of them, before dropping it. He took one fan in each hand again and began to move gracefully across the stage.

Don't judge me
One more night I'll just have to take my chances
And no it's just not in my plan
For someone to care who I am

Now the glimpses were of his flesh. Almost completely bare. Stockings, suspenders and panties fit perfectly on his lithe form. And between the feathers could be seen the black crystal discs that covered his nipples.

I'm walking the streets for money
It's the business of love, 'hey honey'
C'mon, don't leave me lonely, don't leave me sad
It'll be the sweetest five minutes you ever had

Each movement gave more away, until Hannibal had to cross his legs for modesty. He was sure it would be considered crass to be so hard in a room full of strangers, but his body didn't care.

With each longer reveal between movements, the routine began towards a crescendo. Until finally…

One more night I'll just have to take my chances

Will posed on stage, feathers behind him like a peacock, his body glowing under the spotlight. He looked ethereal as his chest rose and fell with the exertion, his cheeks flushed.

And tomorrow we'll see

Slowly the sound of the audience crept into Hannibal's consciousness and he heard them cheering Will as he took a bow and left the stage. Many had risen from their seats to applaud, and whilst Hannibal wanted to do the same, it would be completely improper for him to do so at that moment.

*

Will couldn't help his elation as he got dressed into his day clothes. He couldn't wait to see Hannibal, and only worried for a moment about his clothes. Hannibal had only ever seen him in a hospital gown, half naked on stage or in dirty coveralls.

He felt both over and underdressed by wearing a half tidy button up with some jeans. Certainly a stark contrast to *Silk*.

For a moment his heart fluttered and he hoped that Hannibal took him as he was.

Which, apparently he didn't need to worry about.

When Will got outside, Hannibal was waiting there next to his car, with a smile that only grew upon seeing him.

"Will, you look…" Hannibal didn't finish, his eyes trailing hungrily over him as he took a small step forward.

Will found himself goddamn blushing as he closed the space between them.

"Not too terrible?" Will chuckled, and Hannibal took another step, closing the distance between them and snaking a hand up to the long curls at the back of Will's neck.

"Beautiful," Hannibal murmured, his lips just above Will's. He didn't press forward with a kiss, as Will expected, but instead studied his eyes until Will had to close his own from the intensity. "There is still a little eyeliner, it brings out the blue in your eyes."

Said eyes were slowly fluttering open at the comment. And that was when Hannibal leaned in and kissed him.

Will groaned into the kiss and slid his own arms around Hannibal's broad back, pressing against him.

It was soft and deep, and just so damn good that Will's toes practically curled. It was exactly what he needed, especially after the last few weeks.

He hadn't told Hannibal about Matt's note. For one thing, it wasn't something he wanted to discuss over messages with someone he was just getting to know, kinda maybe starting to date. And for another, it wasn't just a delicate matter for himself, but for Hannibal too from

what he had said in the private dance room. Hannibal had his own history when it came to abuse, even if not as directly.

Will didn't want to seek Hannibal out for comfort. He may have made the man come, but they weren't there yet on many other levels. Despite how much Hannibal already knew about his past.

Even so he found himself melting against Hannibal with a sigh as they began to slow their kiss and pull back.

Hannibal chuckled and pressed a kiss into Will's hair, "We should go get a drink. I know we said this wasn't dinner, but if you're hungry I know a small place that will still be serving tapas."

Will smiled, "That sounds really great."

Hannibal opened the door, like a damn gentleman Will laughed to himself.

*

Hannibal took them to a small Spanish place that Will had never heard of. Not because it was beyond his means, but because it appeared to be some authentic family run place, that was just at the entrance to an alleyway. He'd probably walked on by more times than he could count and never noticed the place.

In truth, it wasn't quite what he'd expected from Hannibal, and was pleasantly relieved. He'd assumed he'd be taken to some swanky place, full of snobs. And this was much more preferable.

When they entered, Hannibal was greeted as an old friend and they were promptly seated at a candlelit table for two.

"Gracias," Will said with a wince, knowing he was likely butchering one of the few words he knew in Spanish. But the smiling maître d' looked at him fondly and gave a nod.

And then the man turned to Hannibal and began speaking French.

Will frowned but stayed quiet as Hannibal thanked the man for the table as they had no reservation. The maître d' responded with platitudes, anything for friends such as Doctor Lecter.

Will didn't miss the man's quick glance at him before he asked Hannibal, rather delicately, if Will was his *le petit ami*. A blush rose on Hannibal's face, that it was very gratifying to see. And without answering the man laughed and slapped a hand on Hannibal's shoulder before turning back to Will.

"This doctor is a very good man," He stopped short of winking.

Will smiled and replied in a perfect French accent, "Oui monsieur, il est un vrai gentleman."

Both Hannibal and the maître d' looked at Will for a moment in silence. Hannibal blushed all the more and the maître d' let out a booming laugh.

“I shall go get you the wine menu.” He chuckled and walked off.

“Will,” Hannibal started, looking a little mortified, “that was very rude of me.”

“For assuming I don’t know anything other than English? Or for talking about me whilst thinking I couldn’t understand you?” Will scowled, but struggled to hide his grin, enjoying watching Hannibal squirm. “Maybe you’re right Doctor, you will be apologising for things, a lot, it would seem.”

Will started to laugh as Hannibal shook his head, still looking rather distraught.

Will decided to put him out of his misery, by redirecting the conversation a little. “Is there a reason they speak French in this Spanish restaurant?”

Hannibal drew himself together, though his cheeks were still a little flushed.

“My Spanish is… lacking. And so when we realised we were both fluent in French, that became an easy to communicate with Javier. I… treated his daughter in the ER once. And have been welcomed here since.”

Javier returned with some chilled water and the wine menu, which Will instantly pushed to Hannibal. Hannibal chose something Will had also never heard of and Javier went off, still wearing a smirk.

“Make a habit of befriending ex-patients?” Will teased and took a sip of the water.

Hannibal shook his head, “Not usually. You’re both unique circumstances. I didn’t realise that Sofia’s family owned this restaurant until I came here to dine by chance one evening with an old colleague. I was glad to hear that Sofia was doing so well after her accident, and felt welcomed to come back again. The tapas is excellent.”

Will cocked his head, “Doctor Lecter, I think you’re secretly a bit of a softy.”

Hannibal huffed a laugh, “Not usually. But… sometimes, perhaps.”

He gave Will such a meaningful look then that his heart slammed into his ribcage and he had to look down at his glass.

“You can speak French.” Hannibal was considerate enough to change the subject.

Will nodded, looking back up again, “Yeah. Learned it in school.” Will said with a shrug and let his Louisiana accent drawl out. The one he’d steadily been losing over the seven years or so since he’d run from his dad. “Also, my gra-mere was actually French. My Grandfather met her when he was stationed in France as a young man. Lied about his age and went into the army, a family scandal.”

“Returning with a lovely French maid,” Hannibal nodded, “Or was she a Parisian socialite?”

Will laughed and shook his head, “She was a farmer’s daughter. Liked the look of Gramps, liked the sound of the American Dream. So she came back with him. She spoke fantastic English, but you’d never know it. She insisted we all speak French at their house, didn’t want her heritage forgotten.”

“Something I understand.” Hannibal replied.

The wine arrived and Javier poured and Hannibal asked for him to just prepare what he felt was the finest tapas on offer for the evening. Which Javier looked delighted about, clearly wanting to show off the talents of his kitchen.

Will smiled as he watched the man head off to the kitchen. “It’s nice here. I like it.”

“I’m glad,” Hannibal replied, a relieved and fond smile playing across his lips.

Will switched back to the previous conversation, “You understand. Because you’re not from the US? You’d want your kids to keep your traditions?”

Will had meant it as a pleasant enquiry, but the way they both flushed at the prospect of children, made him realise his mistake. Did he just ask about kids on their first date?

Hannibal cleared his throat, “I… can understand the desire. But I don’t think it’s something I would think about in detail unless the situation arose.”

It was a diplomatic response, but Will didn’t miss the look in Hannibal’s eyes as he said it. Hopeful and passionate. Which was, terrifyingly, not terrifying.

“You’re from, um, Europe.” Will felt stupid saying it, as though it were all one homogenous place. The only thing he knew for sure was that Hannibal’s accent was continental but not a romance language.

Hannibal nodded, “Lithuania, originally. But I studied in Paris before moving to the United States.”

There was a sense of finality in Hannibal’s words and he took a sip of his wine, and Will knew he clearly didn’t wish to discuss his past right then. Something he could appreciate all too well.

Having to broach his history with people was one of the things that had held Will back from dating after Matthew. Even once he started to regain his confidence and nerve.

The thought of Matt brought Will back to the realisation he still hadn’t told Hannibal about the situation, and wasn’t even sure how to.

He took a sip of his own wine, “I, uh. I should probably tell you. I kind of have guys staying over at the moment.”

Hannibal’s expression went near blank, not entirely shut down, but a quick mask pulled on to hide any expression of emotion.

They paused as Javier arrived with an overly large tray and began placing several small plates of beautiful food in front of them. It was both a welcome reprieve and an annoyance really. They thanked the man and Will tried to pick up where he'd left off.

"No, that came out wrong. Um, security from the club some nights, my friend Shadow and others…" Will winced realising that it was still coming out very wrong. But at the least Hannibal seemed to have realised as much and eased, his expression opening up once more.

Hannibal raised a brow as he looked at him over his drink. "Should I be jealous?" The tone was teasing, but with an edge of something between insecurity and, yeah, jealousy.

Will thought about it for a moment, realising he really was fucking up this whole conversation and tried to lighten the mood with a playful response, starting to help himself to some of the food.

"Should I be jealous about the guy Polly saw you with the first time you came to the club? He comes sometimes you know? On different nights. Are you avoiding him? Jilted lover?" Will asked, an unexpected stab of jealousy running through him nonetheless, now that he'd said it.

The whole thing was ridiculous, Hannibal seemed to be less guarded now, but even so Will was inwardly scalding himself at the turn this conversation had taken.

Hannibal let out a low chuckle and placed his glass back down. "Hardly." He seemed to consider for a moment though, before continuing. "Sutcliffe is a colleague. Though, we had a short fling as residents that went nowhere and meant nothing beyond the stress relief it provided. And despite the occasional suggestive comment, he has thankfully never tried to renew relations between us since we found ourselves working together."

Will let out a slow breath, "Wow. Okay, I was just teasing. I guess I kinda actually should be jealous."

They both chuckled and then Hannibal reached over and placed his hand over Will's, holding it tight.

"You're deflecting Will, you wanted to tell me something. Or… maybe you don't?"

Will sighed, "I do, it's just. Difficult."

*

Hannibal's blood ran cold for the fifth time in as many minutes he was sure, waiting for Will to say what it was he felt he needed to.

Had he misjudged the situation? Did Will already have a lover, perhaps several?

It didn't seem to sit with what he knew of Will, the things Will had said in his notes. The way he seemed to appreciate getting to know each other in that way - at a distance after everything that had happened to him before.

“It’s Matt. He was at Bar Katz.” Will breathed out the words. He seemed relieved after, if a little shaken.

“Will,” Hannibal squeezed Will’s hand harder than intended and then released it a little but kept hold. “Did he hurt you?”

Hannibal tried to quell the rage within him. The rage he felt every time he encountered abuse, but more. Much more like what had happened with Mischa. The same rage he had felt when their parents died.

It wasn’t just rage, it was an absolute and consuming desire for vengeance.

“No, nothing like that. He… he somehow got into the club and left me a note in my tipjar. Nothing threatening, and no one has seen him since, but Bev wants to make sure I’m safe. We reported it to the police and they have been looking for him for questioning for breaking his restraining order. But so far nothing from them either.”

“A note?” Hannibal latched onto that, thinking how special those notes had become between he and Will. “Am I the only one who sends you notes? Other than this one from him?”

Will frowned and nodded, “Yeah, just you.” There was a slight blush there that made him want to draw Will into his arms.

“It seems,” Hannibal started, not sure how to phrase it without worrying Will further. “If it is not a common thing, then perhaps he did it to show you he knows that I have been sending you notes.”

Will let out a shuddering breath, and Hannibal could see him tremble slightly. Felt it in the hand he was still holding.

“Well, that’s terrifying.” Will murmured.

Hannibal nodded, “Perhaps worth updating the police with this. He might well have been watching you for sometime.”

“Fuck,” Will said quietly.

They sat in silence for a few minutes, Will picking a little over the food, though Hannibal suspected Will’s appetite had vanished as much as his own had.

After a few minutes Will looked at him apologetically, “Do you think we could get this to go or something? I think I just… want to go home.”

Hannibal nodded, “Of course.”

It was a quick thing to pay the bill and have the food wrapped. He only wished the knowing looks from Javier and a couple of the other staff were warranted. That they had been leaving so soon under altogether more pleasant circumstances.

When they got outside Will breathed deep of the fresh air and wrapped his arms around himself, though it wasn't particularly cold.

All the same, Hannibal moved behind him, placing his free hand on Will's shoulder. Will turned into him rather unexpectedly and pressed against him, burying it in the crook of Hannibal's neck.

"I hate this," Will muttered. "I want him to stop fucking with my life. This… isn't how I hoped this evening would go."

"It's alright, Will-" Hannibal started but then stopped with a shallow gasp as Will started to nuzzle at his neck. It was all he could do not to drop the bag of food and wrap Will up in his arms. As it was he was hard pressed not to let out a groan.

Will continued to nip and kiss at his neck before drawing back and moving his lips to Hannibal's. It was a tentative kiss, as though Will wasn't sure how Hannibal would react.

That much was clear when Will quickly pulled back and said, "This isn't because of him. I need you to know that. I'm kissing you because it's all I've been able to think about since I came in your lap."

Hannibal let out a low rumble of a chuckle, enjoying the brazen moment. He decided to cease the opportunity to be brazen himself.

"Can I take you home, Will? To… my home, I mean."

"You want to have a sleepover?" Will grinned and then faltered, "Because you're worried about Matt?"

Hannibal let out a sigh and pressed his forehead to Will's, "I can't say it doesn't concern me. But actually… I meant because I'd really like to make love with you."

"Oh!" Will pulled back, wide-eyed and gobsmacked for a moment. And then he let out an embarrassed chuckle and his face heated. "Yeah… I'd like that too. On a first date though?" Will teased.

Hannibal cocked his brow, "Will, we've already brought each other to climax. I'd say this cart is already well and truly before the horse."

*

It was a strange experience watching Will look around his home.

He felt like a weaver finch, displaying his nest and hoping his prospective mate found it acceptable. The thought made him draw breath and then chuckle at himself for thinking of the visit so meaningfully.

Will turned to look at him from where he had been running his finger over a bureau in the hallway.

“It’s fancy, I’ll give you that.” Will teased.

Hannibal smiled warmly.

“Would you like some food?” He asked, holding up the bag.

Will shook his head, despite the hungry look in his eyes. Hannibal swallowed and nodded, leading the way to the kitchen.

“Tea?” He asked.

“Um, whiskey?” Will replied with a chuckle, then shook his head, “Water is fine. I, um… want a clear head.”

Hannibal wasn’t sure if Will were entirely conscious of the way he then drew his lower lip between his teeth.

Or maybe he was? This was the Will Graham who was practiced in seduction, albeit usually from the distance of the stage.

Hannibal set the bag of food down and moved to the small radio, turning it on so that Brahms played quietly in the background as he took the food to the fridge. By the time he turned to fetch glasses for the water, Will was next to the radio, playing with the tuner.

Hannibal blinked. Not so much at Will making himself entirely at home, but at the fact that it didn’t bother him in the least. He’d barely tolerate Mischa doing such a thing, and yet Will?

He watched as Will flipped through the stations, then turned back to one that had caught his attention. His heart ached at how perfectly Will seemed to fit into a place that by rights he would seem so alien in.

“I like this one,” Will smiled at Hannibal as he turned.

Hannibal must have been practically gawking as he stood there with an empty glass in each hand, as Will suddenly looked nervous.

“Shit, I should have asked if I could-”

“No,” Hannibal shook his head and put the glasses on the counter, “No, please. I like that you’ve made yourself at home.” Hannibal felt his cheeks burning before he even finished saying the words.

He clenched his jaw. He’d lost count of how many times he had blushed this evening, but was pretty sure the number was far greater than all the other times previous in his life added up.

Will seemed to sense his feeling of having misstepped and smirked before turning the radio volume up a little and moving in close to Hannibal.

“I like this song. Dance with me?” Will asked, not waiting for an answer before he put his arms up around Hannibal’s neck and began to move a little.

“This isn’t the sort of dancing I’m used to,” Hannibal admitted, letting his own hands slide easily around Will’s waist.

“Me neither,” Will chuckled. “Humour me?”

“Anything,” Hannibal found himself responding breathlessly before allowing Will to lead their dance.

[Nearly Forgot My Broken Heart - Chris Cornell]

When you came along the time was right
Pulled me like an apple red and ripe
Wasn't very long you took a bite
And did me wrong, and it serves me right

Will rested his head on Hannibal’s chest as they swayed together, Will placing his feet here and there in some pattern Hannibal couldn’t discern despite years of ballroom.

Every little key unlocks the door
Every little secret has a lie
Tryna take a picture of the sun
And it won't help you to see the light

Hannibal closed his eyes and savoured the feeling of Will Graham in his arms. So strange to imagine that this would ever be something to happen between them. And yet here they were, and it was perfect.

Every little word upon your lips
Makes a little cut where blood pours out
Every little drop of blood a kiss that I won't miss
Not for anything

Perhaps it was Will’s knowing the song that made his timing so precise that he pulled back enough to press Hannibal into a gentle kiss at the singer’s words.

And I nearly forgot my broken heart
It's taking me miles away
From the memory of how we broke apart
Here we go round again

As the song picked up tempo a little, so did Will. His lips parting and deepening the kiss, his hands gripping in Hannibal’s hair.

Every single feeling tells me this is leading to a heart
In broken little pieces and you know I need this
Like a hole in the head

They were barely moving now, their bodies winding all the more around each other as they kissed passionately. Only drawing back a moment here and there to pant for breath against

each other’s mouths before resuming.

Every single feeling tells me this is leading to a heart
In broken little pieces and you know I need this
Like a hole in the head
And I nearly forgot my broken heart

Will grunted and pushed Hannibal against the counter, no longer dancing at all, and yet that was exactly what they were doing in some respects.

And I nearly forgot my broken heart
It's taking me miles away
From the memory of how we broke apart
Here we go round again
Here we go round again

By the time the music played out and the DJ was introducing the next song, they were deep into one of the most hungry and passionate kisses Hannibal had ever experienced.

Will’s want and hunger for him was as clear as his own for Will.

Though after long minutes rutting against each other against the kitchen counter, it was Will that pulled back to breathlessly say, “Doctor Lecter, take me to bed.”

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Matt Brown returns...

“Wake up, darling.”

Hannibal’s voice was so damn sexy in the mornings, it was almost enough to get Will out of bed. Almost.

"Five more minutes," Will groaned, knowing exactly the response he'd get.

Hannibal hummed and Will felt the bed dip. And then Hannibal was covering him with his entire body, pressing him down into the soft sheets.

"Mmm, that feels good." Will mumbled against the pillow. "Keep doing that."

Hannibal chuckled as Will pushed his ass back against him.

"Insatiable." Hannibal muttered, mock scalding as he started to nuzzle at the side of Will's throat.

"Not that you take much tempting," Will replied with a grin.

Hannibal let out a low rumble from his throat and masterfully rolled Will over and covered him again, this time chest to chest. He resumed kissing Will's throat and then some. Working his way down to mouth against Will's nipples.

"Oh damn," Will groaned, his cock filling rapidly, mirroring Hannibal's own.

When Hannibal worked his way lower, his intent clear, Will stopped him with a hand in his hair.

"I'm not going to see you this weekend," Will panted. "Fuck me. I want to feel you for days."

Hannibal groaned against Will's thigh and started moving back up. He was still open from the night before, fairly well lubed too given that he'd fallen asleep right after Hannibal had finished rimming him and fingering his prostate. Something they’d done a couple of times now, though that was as far as they’d gone in that respect.

Quite different from their first time together, the first few times really. Will had been unsure and despite his gruff bravado, he was a little intimidated by Hannibal's experience. Will had only been with a handful of people other than Matt, and truth was he wasn't even sure what

he liked. He'd always gone along with what others wanted or expected. And Hannibal had been very considerate of that.

That first night, when Hannibal had ridden Will's cock, it had been a revelation.

Hannibal was so gentle, letting Will lead everything. Not pushing the moment he realised that Will wasn't ready to bottom again yet, even without his having to say so. Making it clear there needn't be any penetration at all, or for Will to ever bottom if he didn't want to. And with Hannibal so willing, Will wanted to try topping for the first time. With someone he trusted.

Because he found he trusted Hannibal completely. And Hannibal did nothing to make him regret that trust.

Hannibal slid his fingers down to Will's entrance, feeling him for a moment before pushing inside. His body immediately welcoming two fingers as Hannibal kissed at the scar just above his knee. He often loved on that old injury, as though he could make it all better.

"More," Will groaned.

Hannibal grunted and sat up to grab the lube from the bedside table. He was starting to coat his fingers when Will shook his head and stilled his hand. He felt his face flush as he said, "No I meant… I want you inside me. Your…"

Hannibal let out a long breath. "Are you sure, Will? You know you don't-"

Will pulled him down on top of him. "I *want* to Hannibal. I want you."

Hannibal pressed their foreheads together. "I want you too… Will, I…" He trailed off and Will wasn't sure he was ready to hear what Hannibal was about to say. Not after a few short weeks. Even if it felt longer, and even if he was sure he felt it too. So he looked away and Hannibal took that as a cue to continue his physical attentions.

"Just relax for me, darling." Hannibal rumbled the words gently. Handling Will so tenderly as he moved between his legs. He sat up again and grabbed a condom from the drawer.

Will could see Hannibal's hands shaking slightly as he took it from the wrapper and sheathed himself. He was nervous in a way Will had never seen before. Not flushed with embarrassment, not the trepidation when they discussed that he might some day introduce Will to Mischa. Not his concerns about the upheaval of changing his career. This was something entirely different.

"Are you alright Hannibal? Do *you* want to do this?" Will asked, concerned that he was pushing him now.

Hannibal let out a deep sigh and moved over him, settling fully between Will's legs and resting their foreheads together again.

"Very much so. I just don't want to hurt you."

“You won’t,” Will breathed the words with something like relief. Just knowing that Hannibal wanted to, and that he was only thinking of Will’s comfort, made him ache inside. He cupped Hannibal’s face gently in his hands and pulled him in for a soft, quick kiss. “I trust you. You won’t hurt me.”

Will pressed his point by moving beneath Hannibal, lifting a leg up to Hannibal’s hip as he raised his own. He could feel Hannibal’s hardness resting against him and moaned.

“I want to feel you.” He said again and Hannibal let out a shuddering breath.

Hannibal pulled back a little, slipping a couple of fingers back inside Will, gently moving them in and out, which was really getting Will going. He couldn’t wait for something harder and thicker, but he was glad of the care being shown, how much Hannibal wanted him to be relaxed and open for him.

“Tell me when you’re ready,” Hannibal murmured against his flesh, moving slowly and moving in just the right way that had Will’s cock leaking with anticipation.

“Hannibal, I’m ready, please-”

Will’s breath caught in his throat as Hannibal removed his fingers, lifted Will’s hips and slowly began to slide inside him within a matter of moments.

“Yes, oh god, Hannibal…” Will babbled as Hannibal pushed ever so slowly into him. He stopped now and then, pulled back a little here and there. Each movement driving Will crazy as he remembered how much he had enjoyed this. When it had been good, when it hadn’t been fucked up, like it had become with Matt. He genuinely did enjoy this and being had by Hannibal in this way made his heart fit to burst.

Hannibal’s breaths were coming out uneven as he bottomed out and then stilled completely. Trying to catch his breath.

“Will, you’re so… thank you for this. You’re so…”

He was looking down at Will, studying him with something like awe.

“This is…”

Hannibal was right, it really was. Whatever it was.

Will had never felt anything like it and realised, not least by looking into Hannibal’s adoring gaze, that it wasn’t just the sex. It was the person.

He thought he’d loved Matt. He’d convinced himself that he had to have, otherwise why would he have stayed? Why would he have let Matt do those things? But he’d known for a long while that it had never been love. Not really. Fear and many other emotions, but not love.

This, he realised, was what it felt like to be loved. To be adored and cherished.

“Hannibal,” Will moaned and clung to him as he began to move. Slow, deep thrusts that brushed his prostate at every pass. It had never been like this before. He couldn’t remember a time when sex like this wasn’t just about the other person using his body for their pleasure.

Whilst Hannibal, his expression completely blissed out, was clearly getting pleasure from this, it was also clear that he had Will’s pleasure in mind too.

Hannibal pressed their foreheads together again before lowering his mouth to Will’s. Breathing against his lips for just a moment before kissing him as he rocked them together.

They both moaned into each other’s mouths and Will snaked his arms up around Hannibal’s neck. He clung onto him all the more as their bodies ground together. His cock trapped between their lower bellies, Will whimpered at the amazing friction.

Hannibal began to move just a little faster, still so very deep.

“Oh yeah, oh god…” Will muttered against Hannibal’s mouth as they broke apart to breathe.

He could feel his precome wetting their bellies, the rub of the flesh, the sensation of Hannibal’s body hair against his cut cock.

“Oh god, Hannibal…”

Hannibal grunted in response, panting.

“Will… Will…” Hannibal said his name like a prayer.

“Oh god,” Will clung all the tighter to him as Hannibal angled his hips and pressed against his prostate, causing sparks of pleasure.

Will couldn’t articulate his pleasure, instead gasping and groaning as it all became too much.

The pressure both inside and out was enough, too much. His climax shuddered through him unexpectedly, drawing another grunt from Hannibal as he tightened around him. Will’s whole body strained as he spilled between them, the mess of it sticky and wet.

Hannibal thrust a little faster, a little harder for just a few pumps and then he too went rigid for a moment, letting out a long groan as he came deep inside Will’s now pliant body.

They were both shaking and panting as they came down from their climaxes, and when Hannibal could no longer hold himself there, he collapsed over Will.

The weight of the man on him was perfect. Being held was perfect, and again not something he’d had a lot of. Will buried his face against Hannibal’s shoulder, and sighed.

“Don’t um… don’t go just yet. I want you inside me a little longer.”

“I want nothing more,” Hannibal replied, pulling back enough to caress Will’s cheek and kiss him lightly.

It was perfect.

*

Hannibal hummed as he ducked his head to Will's chest and licked his right nipple, enjoying the way it made his lover's back arch. It had been too long since their last assignation, given both their work schedules. But Hannibal was more than happy to make the most of it for the times they were together. A weekend apart had turned into ten days in the end, and all they'd had were messages between them.

He was intent on making up for lost time, as he licked the nipple again and then sucked and nipped at the erect bud.

When he repeated it again, perhaps marginally rougher, Will sucked in a breath and winced, then drew back.

"Will, did I hurt you?" Hannibal felt a rush of panic. A panic he knew wouldn't always be there, but that needed to be for now. Whilst they were learning to be intimate with each other, especially after Will's experiences.

So he was surprised when, rubbing a hand over his nipple as that to salve pain, Will started to chuckle.

Hannibal looked at him with a cocked brow and found Will grinning.

"Tit tape," Will said, removing his hand and then tracing over an almost faded red mark around his nipple. "I wore pasties in last night's show and nearly ripped my nipples off when I removed them. Really strong adhesive on that tape."

Hannibal smiled, relief flooding him, "Perhaps I can assist in soothing them?"

Will laughed a little harder as he looked down at him.

"You look like a puppy begging for attention. How could I resist?"

Hannibal hummed and pressed his lips to Will's nipple, a gentle press before he slipped his tongue out to caress and soothe.

Within moments, Will was back to moaning and writhing, arching against him so much that Hannibal slipped a hand under his back and braced him there as he continued to lavish one, and then the other nipple, with gentle attention.

"Oh fuck, I think I might just come from this alone," Will groaned.

"Mmm, I'd like to make sure of that," Hannibal purred and ran his hand down to Will's rapidly filling cock before taking it in hand.

"Oh thank god…" Will chuckled, "My hands are killing me too, this is a much better idea."

Hannibal stopped and looked at Will with a cocked brow, always enjoying when Will was relaxed and sassy.

“Too much self care, darling?” Hannibal asked, trying to sound more concerned than amused.

“What? No!” Will replied indignant but still chuckling, “Quite the opposite, that’s the problem. Several fan dances this week, and that’s not including the rehearsing. My wrists and hands are killing me.” It was clearly a strain for Will to talk as Hannibal stroked him, which Hannibal couldn’t help but take a perverse pleasure in as he slowly began to pump.

“Poor, mylimasis,” Hannibal purred the words, knowing Will enjoyed the Lithuanian endearment.

“Mmm,” Will replied, arching his back, pressing further into Hannibal’s firm hand.

“Perhaps I should be massaging your hands instead?” Hannibal said, quite innocently, as he made to stop.

“No,” Will protested with a laugh as he thrust his hips again.

Hannibal responded with a chuckle, before settling beside Will and moving his free arm so that Will could settle in the crook of it. From there it was an easy thing to lean in and kiss the boy whilst he continued to work his length in his palm.

Will broke the kiss to groan, and arch once more as Hannibal increased his speed. With a cry, Will raised his hips and came, shooting hot seed all over his stomach and chest.

“You’re so beautiful,” Hannibal sighed and kissed Will again until they were both quite breathless.

*

After waiting so long to have Will back in his bed, it was a pleasure to have Will next to him again. Not just to feel the warmth of him, but to know Will was safe.

Matthew Brown had never been far from his thoughts since Will explained the situation, and whilst he tried not to make so obvious how worried he was, privately he had deep concerns. If he had the power to do so, he’d not let Will leave if it meant keeping him safe. But of course he’d never do that. Which created an uncomfortable dichotomy of emotions within him.

At the least Hannibal remained on guard. Though there had still been no sign from Matthew Brown, he was vigilant and concerned that the man was just biding his time.

It was late on their second evening in a row where Will had stayed over, and they were both sweaty in each other’s arms when Hannibal was unable to hold the subject back any longer.

“Is there anything more from the police?” He asked gently against Will’s hair, stroking a comforting hand up and down Will’s arm as he did so.

Will hesitated a moment and then shook his head. Hannibal knew that he had just broken into a quiet space for Will, but sometimes these conversations had to be had.

“I called the officer dealing with it and they still have nothing. They think maybe… maybe Matt skipped town.” Will sounded somewhat hopeful.

Hannibal let out a thoughtful hum. He was angry that more wasn’t being done. Though he wasn’t entirely sure what else *could* be done. He just knew it wasn’t enough, not if Will were still at risk. Just as Mischa had been…

“Will… I…” The words stopped in his throat as they had a few times before. “I need to tell you, what happened with my sister.” He forced them out and Will moved, twisting so that he could look at Hannibal.

“Mischa?” Will asked, he’d heard her name many times now, but not yet met her. He knew snippets, little things here and there Hannibal had mentioned, but not the whole story.

Hannibal nodded, his heart beginning to thud in his chest.

“When we were children we were orphaned, our parents… they were killed in an accident and we were sent to orphanages. Me to the boys, she to the girls. She was much younger and was more likely to be placed with a good family if she were alone.” Hannibal had to stop as he choked up at the memory. If only they had remained together.

“Hannibal,” Will said softly, turning in his arms so that they could hold onto each other. He stroked his fingers down Hannibal’s jaw. “You don’t need to tell me anything. But… I’m here if you want to.”

Hannibal thought about his vibrant and beautiful sister, the happy life she now lived here in America. It was hard to believe what had come before, back home in Lithuania. It was hard to believe that it had been their life, so distant it seemed now. Especially as Hannibal tried to revisit the emotions of it as little as possible.

“I told you I went to live in Paris? That was many years after my parent’s deaths. I had been in the orphanage the whole time until they were finally able to locate my uncle and he took me to live with him and his wife there. And by then Mischa had been adopted. Or so we thought. We spent years trying to find her. My uncle was not without friends, and had money enough. A title. And it took all of his sway in the end to finally find what had happened to her.

“She hed been adopted quickly, by a kind couple. But then a little over a year afterwards, they had died in a car accident, and it had been thought at first that Mischa had died too. But she had been with a minder, not in the car. She ended up in the childcare system and then vanished. The records ended there.

“By the time I was able to locate her so many years had gone by. She had been moved from home to home. Some kind, some not. When I found her…” He trailed off, his words drying up at the memories.

Will hushed him and stroked a hand through his hair. “It’s okay, it’s alright.” He encouraged.

“Will,” He breathed out the name, “Will, you can’t imagine. She was barely a teenager when I found her, with the assistance of the best private detective my uncle’s money could buy. She had been with this family for several years. And they… She was little more than a slave. Their own two children didn’t fare much better. When I found her she was malnourished, having eaten only scraps in days. She had bruises all over, where she was pushed and pulled about. A black eye…” Hannibal sobbed then, unable to hold it back any longer.

Will made soothing sounds and leaned in to kiss the tears from his eyes.

Hannibal took a few deep breaths and then composed himself as much as he could. “It was a long recovery, both mentally and physically. I was only grateful that they’d never… never sexually…” He growled the words and squeezed his eyes shut.

“Oh, fuck. It’s okay… It’s okay…” Will soothed him with hands and kisses.

“But even so, she was practically a wild animal. It took years of care and intensive treatment. Years to gain her trust and reassure her she is loved. And all because I couldn’t find her sooner.”

“No, Hannibal. No.” Will replied firmly, “That’s not on you. You didn’t hurt her. You did your best and you found her. When everyone else had lost track of her and didn’t care enough, you did. You…” Will shook his head and buried his face in Hannibal’s neck.

“I’m sorry, Will. This must be overwhelming for you to hear.” Hannibal apologised and held Will tight.

Will shook his head and pulled back a little, no tears but clearly pained. “No, it’s fine. What happened to the family? Were they arrested?”

Hannibal let out an angry scoff. “Their children were taken from them, the wife had fared little better. The husband, he… had friends. His sentence was lenient.”

Hannibal stopped unsure what to say next, how much further to go.

He trusted Will, and couldn’t deny that he was falling in love with him. *Had* fallen in love with him. But this might be too much to put up on anybody. So he simply said, “He died the following year. A robbery, the report said.”

Flashes of images filled his mind. A dark alley, blood blacker than the night sky above him.

“Good.” Will replied, venomously. “He deserved it.” After the words left his mouth, Will drew in a sharp breath.

Will looked a little shocked at his own words and was clearly worried what Hannibal might thing.

Hannibal smiled softly and pulled Will against him, cradling him in his arms as he replied “Yes, perhaps he did.”

And perhaps Matthew Brown did too.

*

“Jesus, Will. You’re so fucking love struck it makes me sick,” Bev teased as she looked at him in the dressing room mirror. He blinked, pulling back from his daydreaming, remembering the previous day when he had lounged around Hannibal’s house all day and pestered him as he cooked. Lay reading in his lap as Hannibal looked over his study notes. Made love before finally falling into a warm and deep sleep.

It had been strangely easy to make himself at home with Hannibal and he was there a large part of the time since that first date. Though *first date* implied there had been more. And the fact was, though they’d been out here and there for dinner and the theatre, it didn’t feel like they were dating. They’d sort of skipped that step and were onto the next one, or perhaps the one after that.

“Ah leave him alone,” Shadow scalded her sweetly and threw Will a beaming smile. “Let the kid be in love.”

Will’s face flushed and everyone was already moving on and getting ready before Will had chance to deny he was any such thing. Which of course, he possibly was. In fact, he was pretty damn sure he was. Not that he planned on voicing it in anyway. Not trusting himself to, really.

Everything was so domestic and… Well, it wasn’t like Will had ever imagined it could be. It wasn’t the dysfunctional home of his father, the abusive one of Matt. It wasn’t his little apartment that now seemed too quiet and lonely even if someone was staying over to make sure he felt safe.

It was the kind of domestic bliss that he had never thought he could have. He hadn’t thought any gay couple could, from the way his dad had spoke about them. But now he did, and it was sort of terrifying, but in a way that thrilled him and made him want to stay as much as it made him want to run away from how overwhelming it all was.

Will finished taking off his makeup and packed up his station, very aware of all the knowing glances and smiles that were being thrown his way. And whilst they might tease him mercilessly sometimes, he was sure glad of their support.

When Will got out front, Hannibal was waiting for him.

On impulse Will covered the distance between them with a short run and then jumped, Hannibal looked slightly startled but managed to catch him nonetheless as his legs wrapped around Hannibal’s waist and he leaned down to kiss him. Hannibal’s hands rested under his ass, holding him in place as Will clung to him like a limpet and kissed him as thoroughly as he possibly could.

Hannibal turned them until Will was up against the car, continuing to deepen the kiss until he felt Hannibal hard against him and laughed. He was almost as hard himself and plenty of passersby were watching their antics.

Hannibal chuckled as he let Will down, pressing him against the car all the same.

“We’re not teenagers you know,” Hannibal teased.

“Don’t I make you feel like one,” Will grinned and winked. Hannibal let out a low groan.

One that Will had become very acquainted with, the one that said *you’ll be the death of me, but it’s okay, I like it!*

They separated long enough to link arms and begin walking towards Javiers, where they had now become regulars. Knowing looks each time they came in, and always a lit candle at their table. All the same, it was intimate and romantic, and Will hated to admit he rather liked indulging in that with Hannibal.

Will cleared his throat as they walked, “Um, Hannibal. I wanted to talk about something but I don’t want to ruin dinner.”

He felt Hannibal look over at him but he continued to stare ahead as they walked.

“This sounds ominous.”

“I just wanted to tell you, and I don’t want to have an in depth discussion about it right now. But I’m thinking about telling the guys they don’t need to come over to mine on the nights I’m home anymore. It’s been quite a few weeks now and we’ve not seen or heard from Matt in that time. Maybe he’s taken off somewhere? The police haven’t found him, maybe he’s just… gone?”

Will tried to sound convinced. And in some ways he was. But moreover he couldn’t keep living his life like this just because of one note. If the police never caught him, how much longer should he ask others to help keep him safe?

“You could move in with me,” Hannibal said with a completely level tone.

Will stopped at that and looked at him, about to reply it was too soon, as much as he didn’t hate the idea at all. In fact he missed Hannibal when they weren’t together and enjoyed the domestic little life they had carved out in Hannibal’s home.

But then Hannibal continued, “In the interests of your safety of course. I have spare rooms that-”

Will chuckled and shook his head, “I appreciate that, Hannibal. A lot. But I think what we have right now is… enough.” Will couldn’t help but add, “for now.”

Hannibal’s lips twitched in a small smile, though it didn’t detract from his concerned frown.

*

It had been a few nights since he and Hannibal had gone for dinner before returning to Hannibal’s home to fall into bed together. The next morning they had made pancakes and had

a leisurely morning just hanging around Hannibal's house, which Will had come to enjoy more than he ever thought he would.

It almost tempted him to take the offer Hannibal had made to move in with him. Almost.

At the least, it had left Will as always, anticipating seeing Hannibal again.

"Boyfriend picking you up," Shadow commented more than asked as they both started out of the club at the same time.

"Yeah," Will replied, no longer even trying to hide the grin. "He's on his way. Just going to get some fresh air whilst I wait."

It had been hot in the club, a sell out audience and an unexpectedly balmy night for the time of year, had meant the aircon wasn't as good as it might have been. Will was just in jeans and a tank top, his shirt folded over his arm, Shadow much the same, only with no shirt.

"Want me to wait with you?" Shadow asked, his tone casual but Will knowing it came from a place of protectiveness.

Will smiled and shook his head, "He'll be here in a few minutes, I just had to get out of the heat."

"Okay, as long as you're sure?" Shadow confirmed and Will smiled and waved him away.

Shadow nodded and wandered off to his car and Will watched him go.

"Will."

Will turned at the sound of his name, expecting to see someone coming out of the club.

The blow was unexpected and floored him.

As Will tried to regain his bearings he looked up, head throbbing from where he'd been hit across the back of his head.

He noticed the billy club in the man's hand before he came into focus.

Matt. Of course it was Matt.

Matt who was then hauling him to his feet, dragging him to the side alley and pinning him against the wall before Will even had a chance to fight back.

"Don't struggle, baby." Matt told him and Will froze. "I've been watching you, waiting to get you alone. I thought we could make it work." Matt shook his head, his body relaxing slightly though his grip on Will didn't.

"I thought you'd see sense. But that fucking Doctor! That Doctor, Will! Were you fucking him when you were in hospital? Is that why you left me?" Matt shook with anger. "For years

I had no idea where you were. And then I saw a poster and even without your face on it, did you think I wouldn't recognise you?"

Will thought about the scar on his leg that his dad had given him during a drunken beating, that Matt had caressed more than once back when he still had Will fooled that he cared.

When Will had seen it on display on the promo images he'd actually felt good about it and told Bev to use them for the posters. It had felt like another way in which he was conquering his past, to so boldly present that flaw without giving a single fuck.

"I was going to keep to myself, just keep an eye on you and make sure everything was okay. But then I see you're with the Doctor, staying over with him. You're making out in the street like a fucking whore! Did you think you could do that to me? Did you think you could push me that far before I had to step in?"

"Matt…" Will tried to interject, not entirely sure what he was going to say, but Matt blustered on.

"That Doctor ruined my fucking life, all so he could steal my boyfriend. The sick fuck, abusing his power like that. I'm going to report him to the medical board, like I should have done years ago."

"Matt," Will growled this time. And not because of the aspersions cast upon Hannibal. He had just reached the end of his ability to stomach the bullshit.

He was scared. He was terrified, because he knew what Matt was capable of. But he also knew he wasn't the same person he had been back then. Not as easily bullied for sure, but also physically stronger, more agile. Completely attuned to his body in a way that made dance second nature. All movement, graceful and swift.

"You need to leave me alone, I have a restraining order." Will snapped.

Matt laughed, giving him a patronising look, as though he were some sweet and naive thing.

Will took the opportunity to surge forward, catching Matt off guard and slamming him back against the opposite wall. His eyes were wide with surprise at the unexpected push back from Will, and Will used that to break free and run back towards the parking lot.

He let out a cry when Matt grabbed him and pulled him backwards and off his feet once more. Will landed heavily on his back and Matt was instantly over him, pinning him down as he straddled him at the end of the alley.

Will started to struggle when Matt pulled out a knife and held it to his throat.

Will stilled.

"Don't worry, Will. I'm not going to kill you." Matt spoke in a tone somewhere between loving and sinister. He moved the knife to Will's cheek. "Let's see if the Doctor is so keen if you don't look quite as pretty any more."

He leaned in close and growled, “I should have done this years ago, then you’d have seen I was the only one who would really love you.”

Will cried out as the knife nicked down his cheek, deep enough to cause a swell of blood that he could feel rolling from the wound.

Rage gripped him and he surged up, causing the blood to gush faster. But he managed to push Matt off all the same. He heard the knife clang to the floor and he threw himself on top of his ex lover.

He gripped Matt’s hair and smashed his head into the ground, making Matt’s eyes roll. It took him a moment to focus again and he looked horrified at Will’s fighting back. He struggled back, getting his hands on Will’s arms and rolling them so Will was beneath him again.

“Will!” The cry came out and Will looked to see a car pulling up and someone jumping out and running towards them.

He wriggled in Matt’s grasp and then managed to get a leg positioned to knee him in the groin.

Matt cried out and rolled off Will, clutching at his dick before finally getting to his feet and running off into the night.

A moment later, Shadow was at Will’s side.

“When I looked back in the mirror I couldn’t see you and I… Fuck. I shouldn’t have left you. I turned the car back and-”

“It’s okay,” Will said as Shadow helped him sit, wincing at the pain the talking caused him. “Not your fault. Matt was…”

“Shh, yeah, I know. Let’s get you back inside. Gonna call an ambulance, and let your boyfriend know.”

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

A happy ending. And some murder.

Chapter Notes

Featuring wonderful art from the fantastic BayoBayo.

“Stop fussing.”

Will’s words were so stern, his tone so flat, that Hannibal realised he had perhaps crossed a line.

He had spent the few days since Will had come to stay with him - temporarily for now - trying to do all he could to care for Will. Whilst trying to simultaneously rein in how completely full of rage he was. Not just at Matthew Brown, but at himself as well.

He’d been late collecting Will, arriving just as he received a call from Ms Katz to say that one of the other dancers had taken Will to the ER. She had given him very little information, which he’d been glad of in the end. Had he known the truth of it, he wasn’t sure what he would have done, but as it was he thought Will had been injured on stage.

But no, he’d arrived at the ER to find Will being questioned by police, his cheek stitched up where it had been sliced with a knife. One being wielded by Matthew Brown.

He’d sat and seethed, clutching Will’s hand as he explained it all to the police and they assured Will that a warrant for Mr Brown’s arrest had been issued.

Hannibal wasn’t blind to how Will had put on a brave face. Then, and the next day, when he was released from the hospital and called Ms Katz to cancel his upcoming performances until his face was less raw, at least. Even when they arrived at Hannibal’s home, Will seemed to be putting on a front.

Perhaps even more so then.

He was sure Will was deeply, emotionally and mentally affected by what had happened but he had closed down. And that had gone from an attempt at being cheery, to becoming more and more withdrawn.

Now with Will asking him to pull back on his attentions, Hannibal knew the best thing to do was humour him.

Hannibal nodded and began to walk away, surprised when Will caught his hand and looked up at him from the large sofa in the lounge.

“I’m sorry.” Will’s words were soft and he really did look contrite, which tore at Hannibal a little.

He sank to his knees next to his lover and shook his head, cupping the unharmed side of Will’s face in one hand. “There is nothing you need apologise for. It’s been an ordeal, you’re bound to feel-”

“I don’t know what I feel,” Will snapped, his tone aggressive, but clearly not aimed at Hannibal by the way he pressed his face all the more into his hand. His sad eyes met Hannibal’s, “It’s like I’ve been split in two and I don’t know which me is right. The me that is terrified and wants to hide and thinks that I’ll never escape from him. Or the me that wants to turn that knife on him and…”

Will shook his head.

“You can be both, Will.” Hannibal said softly, “You can feel both fear and hatred. A desire for vengeance. There’s nothing wrong with any of these emotions.”

With those words Hannibal felt his chest release a little after being tight for days. He might as well have given himself those same words of advice.

“I keep thinking it over, if I’d been able to get the upper hand, what I might have done and…” Will let out a sigh and looked at Hannibal like an imploring puppy. “I keep imagining I had, that I got the knife and stabbed him over and over until he could never hurt anyone again. That scares me too.”

Will tried to pull away from him, as though he’d said something ugly, Hannibal kept the pressure on his face to keep him there without forcing him.

“Will,” Hannibal sighed his name. “This is perfectly natural and nothing you should feel concern over. Retribution fantasies are common, and absolutely understandable. The main thing is not to let those thoughts consume you. The past cannot be changed, but the future can be dictated as best we can.”

They were both silent for a moment and then Will huffed a little chuckle.

“Oh god, is it going to always be like this once you’re a therapist?” Will groaned with amusement. “I already have one therapist and that is very much more than enough.”

“With that attitude, I might start charging you,” Hannibal rebuffed then leaned in and planted a soft kiss on Will’s lips. “Let’s go to bed.”

Will nodded and allowed Hannibal to pull him from the sofa.

Once on his feet, Hannibal swung Will up into a bridal carry, much to Will's begrudging amusement.

"Didn't I say no fussing? My legs still work perfectly fine!"

"Shh," Hannibal responded, kissing Will gently and slowly before breaking in order to start towards the bedroom. He was pleased to see Will grinning the whole way.

A wonderful feeling, to know he could provide this relief for Will. But he wished he could do more.

He had to be patient. He had already engaged a private detective, and once they had Matthew Brown in their sites, Hannibal planned to pay the man a visit.

He'd seen so much death over the years, but this time would be different. As it had been once before.

Looking at the young man in his arms, the love of his life, there was nothing he could regret if it meant keeping Will safe forever.

*

Hannibal woke, for a moment he was unsure what had woken him.

As he roused, he realised it was his phone, half asleep as he reached for it and answered it the same moment the caller hung up.

It took him a moment to recognise the number as Will started to stir next to him.

Freddie Lounds, the detective he'd hired.

"What's going on?" Will asked, rubbing his eyes.

Hannibal was about to respond as much as he could, also baffled as to why the private detective would be calling several hours before dawn. But then they both heard the noise.

It was a big house, but at night sound echoed over the marble and wood. And it had definitely been the sound of the backdoor being forced open.

"Hannibal?" Will looked at him wide-eyed. But it wasn't quite fear, there was something else there too. Like a cornered animal ready to strike, instinct driven.

"Wait here," Hannibal said as he got up from the bed. As he did so, his phone buzzed and this time it was a message from Ms Lounds explaining she had located Matthew Brown and had been trailing him when he started towards Hannibal's house and was now in the garden. She was now calling the police.

Will was already out of the bed next to him, and Hannibal knew better than to argue.

They slowly went to the landing and could make out the soft tread downstairs.

Someone was in the house.

Matthew Brown was in his house.

Hannibal felt rage swell within his chest and he automatically began calculating the most efficient route to the kitchen. He would slash the man's throat with one of his kitchen knives before he had chance to lay another finger on Will.

Hannibal started down the stairs and Will was at his back, mirroring every step. He could feel the protectiveness there. How much Will wanted to keep him safe in return. It created a tumult of emotions within him that he could only repress at that moment, unable to pay them any mind.

Love.

Love, was there.

And Hannibal would kill for love. This he knew about himself.

At the bottom of the stairs they paused, listening again. The house was eerily quiet, even the floorboards didn't creak, no sound from the soft wind outside. It was as though they were in a bubble.

Hannibal reached down and took Will's hand in his own before starting to move slowly forward.

"Ugh!" Will cried out and Hannibal turned just as Will's hand was pulled from his grip.

There he was, Matthew Brown. In *his* house, now dragging Will towards the backdoor with a knife to his throat.

And Will didn't look scared. He could see the rage in his eyes, the set of his jaw.

"You fucking messed with the wrong man, Doctor!" Brown spat the words as he continued to drag Will. "He's mine. Didn't you know? You thought you stole him from me. Been working on him all these years, right? Finally thought he was yours? But that's not right is it Will?"

Brown pressed the last words against Will's cheek, practically kissing them to his skin.

"The police are on their way," Hannibal growled, torn between trying to remain rational and ripping the man's throat out.

"Oh that red-haired bitch outside? No, I ended that call." He chuckled and nuzzled against Will's neck.

The whole time, Will remained calm and still. And it still wasn't fear. Not an ounce of it.

His eyes never left Hannibal as though he were ensuring that Hannibal remained safe and whole.

And then it happened.

So fast.

Brown adjusted his stance, moved his hand. The knife no longer against Will's throat as he made himself comfortable. The hand in front of Will's face for a split second. And that was all it took.

Brown screamed as Will's teeth sank into his hand. He dropped the knife immediately and flung Will from him and into Hannibal's arms.

"You fucking bitch! I should have beat you until-" Brown cut himself off, having screamed the words and now cradling his bloody hand.

Hannibal set Will aside and moved forward quickly, punching Brown in the face whilst he was still unable to recover. Brown screamed again and reared as though about to attack, but then Will was there.

He'd rushed forward, barrelling into Brown and taking him down to the ground. Brown, stunned and blinking, hesitated long enough for Will to grab his hair and slam his head down into the floor with absolutely no restraint, once. Twice.

The man's eyes rolled in his head and he appeared to lose consciousness. Hannibal moved forward to check, intent on ensuring he was completely incapacitated when Will stopped him with a raised hand, still straddling the prone form.

"No. Get the phone, call the cops."

Hannibal hesitated a moment and looked between the two men. He wished he had been in Will's place. He wouldn't have stopped until the man's brains were bloodied across the kitchen floor.

"Hannibal!" Will growled and Hannibal was back in the moment.

"Yes, yes of course." He hurried from the room to get his cell phone.

He didn't use the phone in the kitchen.

He didn't.

His heart was thumping as he raced up the stairs and back down again. But not too fast. Not too slow.

Because… because…

He was trembling when he got back to the kitchen door, pausing a moment.

Because. Because Will needed this.

More than he did.

He tried to compose himself as much as would be expected and started to dial.

He entered the room, phone in hand and already ringing through to the emergency services.

He came to a stop, looking down at Will who knelt over Matthew Brown's body with Brown's knife now in hand. The one that had sliced his face, now covered in blood and hovering over the intruder's chest, having clearly just withdrawn from it.

"He attacked me," Will said coldly, electric with vengeance..

So beautiful.

"911, what's your emergency?" The voice on the other end of the phone brought Hannibal crashing into the reality before him.

"Police please, we've had a break in. An intruder attacked us." Hannibal relayed the address and that they knew the intruder to be his partner's stalker and violent ex.

"Okay sir, are you able to stay on the line? Are you safe right now? I've put a call out to officers in your area."

"Perfectly fine, he… I think he may be dead." He and Will did not break eye contact. "In the struggle, he… he was impaled on his own knife."

"Officers are on their way," The voice reasserted before giving more instructions that Hannibal barely took in. He couldn't tear his eyes from Will, ending the call when he heard the car pull up outside, he stepped closer to his lover.

The police had arrived quickly, which was par of the course in his affluent neighbourhood, and it felt like his entire vision was filled only with Will and the flashing lights from outside, casting spots that made it look like Will was back on stage.

So beautiful.

The vengeful, powerful creature splattered in blood and wearing it like a cloak of pride.

He was beautiful. So beautiful.

"When you left to get the phone, I went to pick up the knife. Just in case. I didn't trust that he… he wouldn't come after me again." Tears collected in the corners of Will eyes and Hannibal could see they were real. Relief and fear of… something. "And then, he just… suddenly he was getting up and he got to the knife before me. He attacked me again and we struggled, we went down to the floor and I don't… I don't even know how it happened. He tried to stab me but I managed to roll us and then the knife was sticking out of him..."

Will began to cry, and Hannibal recognised that for what it was. Fear that Hannibal would refute this, and would think differently of Will. That Hannibal would hate Will for knowing what truly happened. For knowing that Matthew Brown had not moved an inch since he'd left the room.

“I heard you,” Hannibal replied. “Calling for me, I came back as fast as I could.”

Will blinked, tears stopping as he looked at Hannibal wide-eyed and nodded. “Yeah, that’s what happened.”

The police were knocking on the locked front door, two more came in through the open back door, hands on sidearms. They assessed the scene quickly, separated them both but reassured them all the same.

“We need you to both come to the station for questioning.” The officer told them before taking them in separate cars to answer their separate questions about the fate of the late Matthew Brown.

*

Will stretched out and and arched his back.

“You’re always so fucking stunning it makes me sick,” Bev complained before grinning at him. “I would ask that you don’t over do it on your first performance back, but that would be so incredibly pointless.” Clearly referring to his state of dress, the sparkly blood red shorts but no harness this time. His body was almost entirely covered in bodypaint, expertly applied by an artist friend of Bev’s who had jumped at the chance.

Will shot her a grin of agreement, “Besides,” Will offered, “Hannibal is in the audience tonight and I want him to see this new routine.”

Bev jovially rolled her eyes, “Young love!”

She wandered off and Will was still smiling when he turned back to the dressing room mirror. His face hurt a little from the strain of the smile, but it was manageable.

He sighed at the reflection. The scar was a thin line now, still a little red. The cuts and bruises of the fight had healed. *He* had healed. He’d thought that the scar would serve as a reminder of what he’d done. What he was capable of.

And it did. But it wasn’t guilt he felt. It was something righteous and strong.

All the more so when the police discovered, thanks in part to the investigation that the shaken but safe Freddie Lounds had conducted, of Matt’s capabilities. Will provided the information of his restraining order, his hospital report. Randall came forward too. And, it turned out they were the lucky ones.

The police had been unable to locate Matt Brown when he’d broken his restraining order, because he’d been hiding out with his new boyfriend, Anthony. The man was found beaten and tied to his own bed. Matt had clearly been staying there for a while, and apparently hadn’t cared - with his renewed fixation on Will - that Anthony had starved to death tied to that bed.

Will shuddered at the memory.

How could he feel guilt when it meant Matt could never hurt anyone again?

“Up next,” One of the stage managers popped her head around the door and let Will know.

He nodded and then took a breath, heading out to the wings.

*

Will strode out onto the stage as the music began thumping, striding towards his pole.

[The Vengeful One - Disturbed]

There were gasps, and Will drew a breath. He ignored the audience and their reaction as he stalked around the stage before moving back towards the pole.

He is observing the chaos, taking in the lack of raw humanity
It's as if the entire world's fallen in love with their insanity
Hear the innocent voices scream
As their tormentors laugh through all of it
No forgiveness from all I've seen
The degradation I cannot forget

He knew what they saw. The shorts barely distinguishable on stage from the body paint. The colour so deep red it looked almost black under the stage lights. And the colour continued up and down his body, bleeding into a lighter red, into an orange, into a painting of a phoenix in gold glitter that shone under the lights. And where the phoenix ended the paint tapered off, not in feathers, but in what might appear to be blood splatter.

Will grabbed the pole and swung himself up onto it.

So sleep soundly in your beds tonight
For judgement falls upon you at first light
I'm the hand of God
I'm the dark messiah
I'm the vengeful one

He moved from a *superwoman* pose into a *viva*, rotating around the pole as he hung down, giving the audience the perfect view of the bird seemingly erupting from his chest.

In the blackest moment of a dying world
What have you become

He moved seamlessly into the *star* pose, more gasps from the audience as he appeared to fly with every pose, perfectly attuned to the beat.

As the violence surges
And the teeming masses have been terrorized
The human predators all gone mad
Are reaping profits born from their demise

Will continued to switch effortlessly from pose to pose. As though he weighed no more than a feather.

When you die
You'll know why
For you cannot be saved
With all the world enslaved

As the tempo changed, he moved into a *lay out*, then some leg hangs. More like a dying swan in some ways.

I'm the hand of God
I'm the dark messiah
I'm the vengeful one

He pulled his body tight to the pole in a *cradle* before moving out again into a *superman* pose. More. Faster. Harder. Pushing.

In the blackest moment of a dying world
What have you become
I'm the hand of God
I'm the dark messiah
I'm the vengeful one
Look inside and see what you're becoming

Pushing himself so that the body paint began to smudge against the pole, against his other limbs. Making the bird seem all the more part of him.

The beat continued, the hard beats as he came back down to the stage, down onto one knee and then back up. Arms outstretched. Displaying the bird. The phoenix. Displaying himself.

The crowd cheered

*

Hannibal loved him gently that night, kissing at the little spots and patches of paint that he had missed when trying to remove it all.

Will lay pliant and let Hannibal worship him until they both came.

As they lay quietly in the afterglow, Will broke the silence with something he had yet to acknowledge out loud, though he knew Hannibal knew. And he knew that Hannibal loved

him all the same. Perhaps because he would have done the same had Will not got there first?

“Should I feel guilty? About Matt, about what I did?” It felt rhetorical the moment the words left his mouth, but he still wanted Hannibal’s thoughts. And he had wanted to say it, had wanted to acknowledge it aloud.

“Don’t let him haunt you, Will.” Hannibal said softly. They lay side by side and Hannibal held up his hand for Will to take. Which he did. Hannibal put it to his mouth and laid a gentle kiss before continuing, “It's the inevitability of there being a man so bad that killing him felt good.”

Will’s breath caught. He hadn’t said that. But he had felt it, and Hannibal had known. Had seen that in him. And still loved him.

“Killing him felt just.” Will found himself saying, not sure he was trying to convince or whether there was really any need to.

So he said it out loud, finally.

“I liked killing him.”

“Killing must feel good to God, too. He does it all the time, and are we not created in his image?” Hannibal rejoined without missing a beat. And Will couldn’t help the smile on his face. So like Hannibal to inject some other level of extra into the whole thing.

“Depends who you ask.” Will replied, a slight tease in his tone.

“Mmm,” Hannibal agreed, amused. “God's terrific. He dropped a church roof on thirty-four of his worshippers last Wednesday night in Texas, while they sang a hymn.”

Will chuckled and shook his head, sometimes this man really was too much. And that was just about perfect. He was simply everything Will needed.

“Did God feel good about that?”

“He felt powerful.”

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Three years later

Will sat at the table with Bev, looking up at the stage as the young dancer stepped off of the stage in the last of their open auditions.

“Was I ever that young?” He mused, to which Bev laughed.

“No. Shit, Will, you were nearly thirty when started here. These young’uns are all barely legal.”

“Hey!” Will objected, “I was twenty-six! The hell Bev!”

She laughed again and he nudged her in the ribs. “Stop before your barely legal recruits start thinking you’re laughing at them! That kid was good.”

“Cute ass,”

“Ugh, Bev.” Will let his head sink into his hands.

“Does my ass still look that good?” He teased.

She barked a laugh and then covered her mouth to stifle the rest of the laugh. “What is with you today?”

“I don’t know,” He admitted, before standing and collecting together their empty glasses, ready to help himself to another round from the bar. “Feeling my age I guess. What happens when my ass is too saggy to shake any more?”

“Firstly, age is just a number. Secondly, Will Graham, how would I ever cope without you? You want to retire from dancing then I’ll just have to give you a job on the crew. Stage management? Or maybe we can put together a troupe, you can train and choreograph them.”

Will stared at her wide eyed, knowing her well enough to know she was completely serious. “Bev, really you’d-” He started, overwhelmed and thrilled at the same time.

She waved a dismissive hand.

“But we’re talking yeeeeeears from now, baby!” She slapped his ass, “In the meantime, I need a drink.”

Will took a cab home once the rehearsals were over, feeling buoyant at the choices of new hires they’d made, and that he’d been involved in the process. And, yes, also at what Bev had said about if he wanted to retire. He couldn’t remember a day with so much good news in it.

So he was surprised to pull up to his apartment and see the Bentley outside. More than a little worried that there was something wrong.

He didn’t have plans with Hannibal, in fact, he thought that Hannibal would still be busy overseeing the fitting out of the office he had set up for his private practice. And it was just like life to drop another shoe on him. Too much good news today meant surely something terrible was about to happen.

He climbed out of the cab and paid quickly before rushing over. Hannibal looked a picture, sitting in one of the deck chairs on the forecourt. And as amusing as the image was, Will’s heart was still thundering.

“Hannibal? What is it? Is it Mischa? Is everything okay?”

Hannibal looked up at him with a soft smile and a frown, one that deepened as he stood and realised Will's concern.

"Mischa and the baby are fine. I just wanted to come and see you. I needed to talk to you about something."

Will took a shuddering breath and winced. Surely no good could ever come from your boyfriend telling you they needed to talk about something?

"I was… considering asking you to move in with me." Hannibal started and Will winced again at the wording.

"Considering? You changed your mind?" Will tried to laugh, as though it were a joke, but his heart was straining. He already stayed over a few times a week, Hannibal sometimes stayed with Will, but with Hannibal's office so close to his house, it made sense they would likely spend more and more time there.

"It occurred to me that you moving to my house would be rather inconvenient-" Hannibal stopped when Will blew out a heavy breath.

Will nodded, "Sure, I get it."

"No, Will I don't think you do." Hannibal continued and Will's heart clenched.

Was he? Was he breaking up with Will? After everything?

No one had truly seen Will as Hannibal did. No one understood him in the same way. No one loved him so well or so thoroughly. He thought they were both happy.

Hannibal shook his head, "I'm not saying this right. I mean that, my house has never been convenient in relation to your jobs. And I know how much you love working here and at the club. I would never ask you to change that. I know what it is to need to find the employment that fits best." Hannibal took Will's hands and looked at him with so much adoration.

"You don't have to work at all if you don't want to, Will." Hannibal told him gently.

Will scowled at him, "Doctor Lecter, if you think I am about to become your kept boy then you don't know me very well at all."

Hannibal's mouth tweaked into a smile and he kissed Will softly on the lips.

"Exactly the response I expected. And that's why it seems the only solution is for me to move this side of the city. For us to get a place together. A home that is mine and yours."

Will blinked.

It took him a moment to realise he wasn't breathing before he gasped in a breath, still a little breathless when he said, "Hannibal… I…"

Hannibal frowned, and looked nervous. He looked terrified that Will was going to say no.

“Will, I find you perplexingly unpredictable. Is it what you want? Will you-”

Will reached up and smoothed his thumb over Hannibal’s frown, before sliding the hand around his neck and pulling him into a kiss.

They held each other for a long moment, pressing close, before Will finally pulled back.

“Yes. I’d love that. I have savings, from tips and… I can help. I want to help.” The words had started excited but ended firm.

Hannibal’s mouth twitched a little at the corner, “I had assumed that would be the case. As long as you’ll let me treat you? I will of course want to fit out a kitchen at least as good as the one I have now. So it would be only right that we also have a dance studio installed for you.”

Will laughed and shook his head, “You’re insane.”

“Hmm,” Hannibal agreed and kissed him again.

Will pulled back after a moment, wriggling from Hannibal’s arms before taking hold of his hand.

“Come up, I’ll give you a preview of my new routine… And when you give me my studio I’ll perform for you all the time if you like. You won’t even need to tip.”

Hannibal grinned and allowed himself to be led up to the apartment. “Do I still get to send you love notes and sketches?”

“Pfft, I’ll expect them pretty regularly.” Will shot back over his shoulder as he unlocked the door and let them in.

“Over there,” Will pointed to his bed and Hannibal went without question, walking around the pole that had been a permanent fixture of the room for years, and settling on the edge to sit and watch.

Will walked over to his stereo, stripping as he went until he was just down to his boxers. Another amused hum came from Hannibal and Will smiled, knowing he’d likely realised Will was already half hard.

Will pressed play.

[Glitter & Gold - Barns Courtney]

He began to stalk towards the bed, running his hands up his naked torso.

I am flesh and I am bone
Rise up, ting ting, like glitter and gold
I've got fire in my soul
Rise up, ting ting, like glitter

“Is this a spotlight dance or one for the private rooms?” Hannibal asked with a raised brow as Will reached him and placed his hands on Hannibal’s thighs.

Like glitter and gold

“You know I only private dance for you, mylimasis,” Will winked and Hannibal groaned.

Like glitter

Will grazed his fingers over Hannibal’s hardened length before taking a step back.

Do you walk in the valley of kings?
Do you walk in the shadow of men
Who sold their lives to a dream?

He stalked around the pole, glancing over at Hannibal as he started to shed his own shirt and tie.

Do you ponder the manner of things
In the dark
The dark, the dark, the dark

Will grabbed the pole and swung onto it, moving into a few new and difficult poses he’d been working on, but all the while watching Hannibal as he stripped.

I am flesh and I am bone
Arise, ting ting, like glitter and gold
I've got fire in my soul
Rise up, ting ting, like glitter
Like glitter and gold
Like glitter

Will came back down to the floor, back arching as he strode back towards Hannibal, breathing heavily and oh so achingly hard as he grabbed hold of the man and kissed him roughly.

Do you walk in the meadow of spring?
Do you talk to the animals?
Do you hold their lives from a string?
Do you ponder the manner of things
In the dark
The dark, the dark, the dark

“I want to fuck you,” Will growled against Hannibal’s mouth and swallowed the responding moan.

I am flesh and I am bone
Arise, ting ting, like glitter and gold

Will pushed Hannibal down onto the bed and stripped off his own boxers, leaving them both naked.

I've got fire in my soul
Rise up, ting ting, like glitter

It had been a few weeks since Will had penetrated Hannibal, still mostly prefering to bottom, but sometimes he was so hard and wanting that he was fit to explode at even the thought of Hannibal tight around him.

I am flesh and I am bone
Arise, ting ting, like glitter and gold
I've got fire in my soul
Rise up, ting ting, like glitter

Hannibal groaned as Will moved his mouth to his throat, sucking kisses into his flesh.

'Cause everybody's in the backroom's
Spinning up
Don't know what you're asking for

Will forced himself to break away to reach over for the lube. Cracking it open and pouring it into his hand.

And everybody's in the front room's
Tripping out
You left your bottle at the door
'Cause everybody's in the backroom's
Spinning up
Don't know what you're asking for
And everybody's in the front room's
Tripping out
You left your bong at the door

“Will, please.” Hannibal didn’t beg so much as he growled. And Will knew exactly what he wanted.

He pushed two slick fingers into Hannibal and began to finger fuck him. Hannibal groaned and his head went back into the pillows.

I am flesh and I am bone
Arise, ting ting, like glitter and gold
I've got fire in my soul
Rise up, ting ting, like glitter
Like glitter and gold
Like glitter
Like glitter and gold
Like glitter

The song finished and all that was left in the room was their panted breaths as Hannibal relaxed into Will's ministrations. It felt like time stopped when Will slicked his cock and pushed inside Hannibal with just enough resistance to give them both a gloriously pleasurable friction.

Will angled Hannibal's hips up and then practically curled over him so he could lean in to kiss him as he began to thrust.

It was exquisite, the way Hannibal opened to him.

The way they fit perfectly together in every way.

"I'm going to rip up the kitchen," Hannibal panted when Will moved his mouth back to Hannibal's neck, nipping as he thrust deep and hard.

"Bring it with us… to the new house…" Hannibal was moaning out the words. "Keep it with us."

Will felt a strange laugh bubble up in him. Not leaving evidence? Expensive imported marble that Hannibal wouldn't want to replace?

No.

No.

Will was breathless as he started to kiss Hannibal again, panting against his lips as he pounded into him, burying himself over and over.

He wasn't going to last. He couldn't.

"A memory. My beautiful phoenix," Hannibal babbled the words, and Will realised how close his lover was too.

He reached a hand between them and began to jerk Hannibal hard and fast. Images coming to him unbidden of the antlered man laying on that floor, where Matt had been. Laying there bleeding.

"You looked so beautiful in your vengeance." Hannibal grunted out the words through his pleasure.

Will couldn't hold back any longer, and then Hannibal cried out and his body began to constrict. He felt like he could breath freely for the first time in his life.

Will came in the same moment and Hannibal's tight passage milked him as he emptied himself deep.

He spilled over and over, crying out as Hannibal continued to clench until there was nothing left in either of them.

He collapsed forward onto the mess Hannibal had made between them, even as he felt his own come start to leak back out of Hannibal as he softened inside him.

They panted together, holding each other tight.

“Always, so beautiful. Like silk.” Hannibal muttered, pressing a kiss into Will’s sweat damp curls.

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